



Because prevention is intangible, Japanese tend to emphasize treatment instead.

Communication is also intangible and often overlooked. Patients in Japan accept the routine approach of Japanese dentistry as being the norm; therefore, people don't really know how to talk to their dentist about their problems and concerns. This makes it difficult for dentists to explain the advantages of new equipment and methods to patients. Furthermore, the fact that public dental schools lean heavily on paper testing rather than practical testing to build up these intangible skill sets doesn't help the situation.

So, here are some specific things to consider when selecting your dentist in Japan:

COST & INSURANCE

Dental treatment can be very expensive in many countries, and using insurance you have back home can be even more difficult. Fortunately, general costs for dental treatments in Japan are far lower than those in the United States, for example. Here, the average fee for a root canal is between \$50 and \$70. In the U.S., the same procedure will run you \$800-\$1,500. With the right dentist, you can get the level of treatment you would expect back home, and manage the costs as well. Some dentists will accept your private overseas insurance. Ask your dentist whether they only want to use options covered by the national health insurance system for your treatment, or if they look for the superior solution that will be better for you in the long term.

Maintaining the Perfect Smile

What to do when you need a dentist in Japan

BY DR. MIYU TAKASHIMA



Getting sick in a foreign country can lead to unexpected stress. When in our home country, we know where to go and what to do. We also know what to expect in terms of services, fees, and insurance.

When it comes to seeking out or receiving dental treatment in Japan, my friends from abroad often express concern about what to

look for. Let me break it down for you.

This is the exact dental care you should seek: The best customized care advised by dental specialists. Obvious? Yes. But here's why it has to be this way.

NATIONAL POLICY

The government controls prices in order to manage the costs of providing coverage. While the National Health Insurance system makes basic dental treatment more affordable to Japan's citizens, many advanced procedures are not covered. This discourages dentists from using the most modern techniques, medicines, and materials.

Many Japanese dentists study and offer more advanced treatments. The key is getting to know your dentist.

JAPANESE CULTURE

Japanese often say "Can you make it as a service?" when we want something extra for free. Culturally, Japanese tend to place monetary value on products, but not on service. This also holds true when it comes to health/dental care.

TREATMENT

If a root canal is in the cards, find out if your dentist uses a rubber dam (a latex sheet that prevents the bacteria in saliva from splashing back into the tooth). Without it, you cannot fix the root cause, and it will likely reoccur. Although, there are more than 68,000 dental clinics in Japan, only 2% use it.

STERILIZATION

The easiest way to gain comfort about the safety of a clinic is to check which type of autoclave they use for sterilization. Class B is the best, and 5% of clinics in Japan use it. Class N is also good if they don't pack their instruments.

These are good starting points for finding out whether a dentist is right for you. And making sure that you have the right match for your treatment needs will make all the difference when it comes to a positive experience when receiving dental treatment in Japan.

■ Miyu Takashima runs 3D digital equipment at Kamiyacho dental clinic, treating patients from Japan and abroad.