

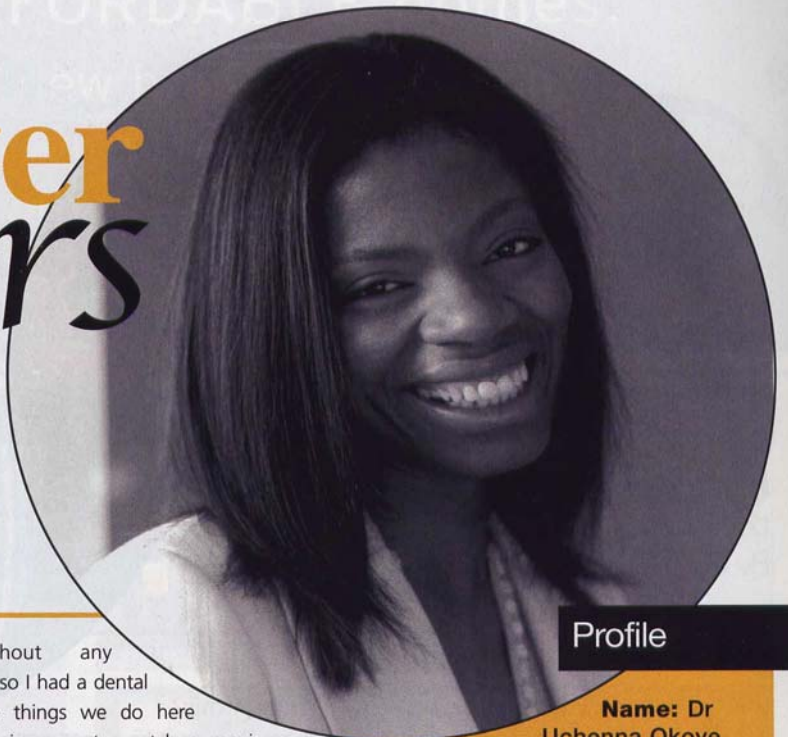


PRIDE

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Power Players

Dr Uchenna Okoye is an award-winning cosmetic dentist and one of only three female cosmetic dentists in the UK. By Cynthia Lawrence



Profile

Name: Dr Uchenna Okoye

Occupation: Director and principal cosmetic dentist

Place of work: Godge Street Dental Centre and Gloucester Road Smile Centre
Age: 36

For somebody who had a phobia of dentists, Dr Okoye certainly is an exception to the rule! Responsible for putting the sparkle back into smiles, she owns two leading West End practices that specialize in aesthetic dentistry.

Most people would find it repulsive to look into people's mouths for a living! What inspired you to do this?

I was actually petrified of dentists. When I said I was getting into dentistry, my family started rolling about laughing! It was a toss up between that and medicine. I'm a bit of a control freak, so I knew that I wanted to be in charge of the treatment and see everything through to the end. I did general dentistry first, then progressed into cosmetic.

What does aesthetic dentistry entail?

It's mainly giving people new smiles. The biggest thing it does is give people confidence, because the smile is the first thing people meet. It's not just about teeth – I call it facial aesthetics.

What are the costs?

Anything from £300, if you're just having teeth whitened. Having a full smile makeover can be anything from £8,000 to £20,000, depending on how extensive, but payment plans are available, as they are for any big investment, like a car or a kitchen. What they all say is, instead of buying a new car, they're buying a new smile.

Growing up, did you have any problems with your own smile?

I had a very sweet tooth; I had teeth taken out,

once without any anaesthetic, so I had a dental phobia. The things we do here include allowing you to watch a movie while we work on you, and you can have massages. All of those are because of the horrific experiences I had as a kid! I can understand why 50 per cent of the British public don't go to the dentist.

How did you set up your two practices?

I had a vision of the kind of practice I wanted and it wasn't available. So I went out, bought one and converted it. I'm very service-oriented, so I spend a lot of time in America. In time, I developed the second practice, which is much more spa-oriented.

Do you get a lot of compliments from guys on your brilliant smile?

I'm married! What I generally get is men walk in and they're looking for the dentist. Then they realize it's me and they say, "Oh, you don't look like a dentist!", which I find quite amusing. I guess I don't fit a lot of the stereotypes. You don't get many women in dentistry, and you definitely don't get many black women in dentistry and owning practices. A lot of my mail is still to "Mr"!

Why do you think there are so few women in dentistry?

It is a challenge. It's hard running a business and doing the clinical stuff. Dentistry has got one of the highest suicide rates. I think for a woman it's just a fantastic business. Even with the cosmetic dentistry, most of my clients are women. There's just that affinity to it.

What do you think of the emergence of makeover programmes such as 10 Years Younger?

I know lots of people moan and groan about them, but I think they're fantastic. I don't do a full smile makeover on everybody that walks through my door. I had a lady last week and she spent 30 years not smiling, being ashamed of her teeth. She came to me because she'd been passed over for promotion twice and they said it was because she looked miserable. She looked miserable because of her teeth. We did her teeth and now she is up for promotion. She's a new woman, and her life has just taken off. Being able to make that change in somebody's life is such a blessing.

What is your long-term vision?

My vision is to change the face of dentistry in this country. I want to do for dentistry what has happened to opticians. The fact that you use your glasses to see is almost secondary, glasses are a part of your image and the person you are. I want to do the same thing for teeth. Dentistry is not sexy; I'm trying to make it sexier!