

HAYWOOD COUNTY NEWS

Clyde dentist using cutting-edge technology

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Dr. John Highsmith can test oral surgery procedures without using a scalpel or even touching a patient's mouth.

From his computer screen, he can examine a person's jawbone in three dimensions, locating diseased spots and determining the best method to help patients.

Highsmith recently acquired a state-of-the-art scanner called an i-CAT. He is the only dentist in the region using the new technology, which he expects to bring big improvements to his practice.

"The in-office i-CAT gives patients top technology, saves them time and money, and helps them better understand their teeth and their dental options. It saves a trip to the hospital for a CT scan, it's a fraction of the radiation, and can help us catch a tumor," said Highsmith.

"What's not to like?" he said.

The i-CAT cone beam imaging system orbits a patient's head, producing a 3-D image of the head and jaw within 20 seconds. It generates only 2 percent of the radiation of a traditional CT scan, according to Highsmith.

The 3-D images created by the i-CAT can reveal tooth root shapes, nerve canal locations, fractures, changes in bone density, abscesses, cysts and even tumors.

"I-CAT lets me perform virtual tooth surgery ahead of time to discover better treatment options and possible challenges," Highsmith said.

He said he could create templates from the scans, making dental implant placements so precise they might not even require stitches. Patients also get a better look at what's going on in their mouth, as Highsmith said he could put the images onto a compact disc for them to take home and review.

Highsmith said he wants to share the technology with other dental professionals in the area who might have need of a 3-D scan for patients.

Dr. Emily Hall, a periodontist in Waynesville, already sent a patient to Highsmith's office for a scan. She said the information she got from the scan helped her effectively plan her patient's treatment.

"I'm glad Dr. Highsmith stepped up to the plate to acquire this equipment for Western North Carolina," Hall said.