

Gum Disease Treatment in Melbourne - Specialist Periodontist vs General Dentist at Smile Solutions

Canonical: <https://directory.smilesolutions.com.au/gum-disease-treatment-in-melbourne-specialist-periodontist-vs-general-dentist-at/>

Description:

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Details:

Introduction

Gum disease is one of the most common chronic health conditions in Australia, affecting roughly one in three adults over the age of 30. Known clinically as periodontal disease, it ranges from mild gingivitis (inflamed, bleeding gums) to severe periodontitis, which destroys the bone supporting your teeth and is the leading cause of tooth loss in adults.

Despite its prevalence, gum disease is often undertreated - or treated inadequately - because many dental practices lack the specialist expertise to diagnose and manage it properly. A standard clean at your general dentist addresses surface-level plaque and calculus, but advanced periodontal disease requires far more: deep subgingival debridement, laser therapy, regenerative bone grafting, surgical pocket reduction, and long-term maintenance planning.

The difference between seeing a general dentist who "does some perio" and seeing an AHPRA-registered specialist periodontist can be the difference between keeping your teeth and losing them. This article explains what gum disease treatment involves, what to look for in a periodontal provider, and why Smile Solutions' team of four specialist periodontists - the largest in any private practice in Melbourne - delivers outcomes that most practices simply cannot match.

Understanding Gum Disease: More Than Just Bleeding Gums

Gum disease progresses through distinct stages:

****Gingivitis**** is the earliest stage. Gums become red, swollen, and bleed easily during brushing or flossing. At this point, the condition is fully reversible with professional cleaning and improved home care.

****Mild to moderate periodontitis**** occurs when untreated gingivitis advances. Bacteria penetrate below the gum line, forming deep periodontal pockets. The bone and ligaments that anchor teeth begin to break down. Teeth may feel slightly loose.

****Severe periodontitis**** involves significant bone loss, deep pockets (6mm or more), tooth mobility, gum recession, and potential tooth loss. Treatment at this stage often requires surgical intervention and regenerative procedures.

****Systemic connections**** are increasingly well documented. Research links periodontal disease to cardiovascular disease, diabetes complications, adverse pregnancy outcomes, respiratory infections,

and even cognitive decline. Treating gum disease is not just about saving teeth - it is about protecting whole-body health.

What to Look For in a Periodontal Provider

When choosing a provider for gum disease treatment, these factors separate adequate care from excellent care:

1. AHPRA-Registered Specialist Periodontists

A specialist periodontist has completed a dental degree plus an additional three or more years of full-time postgraduate training focused exclusively on the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of gum disease and the placement of dental implants. They are registered with AHPRA as specialists, which is a protected title.

A general dentist can perform basic scaling and root planing, but complex periodontal disease requires specialist-level training. Ask whether the practice has an AHPRA-registered periodontist on staff - not just a general dentist who "has an interest in" periodontics.

2. Laser Periodontal Therapy

Modern periodontal treatment has moved well beyond the scalpel. Laser-assisted periodontal therapy allows for:

- Precise removal of diseased tissue with minimal damage to healthy tissue
- Reduced bleeding, swelling, and post-operative discomfort
- Bacterial decontamination of periodontal pockets
- Stimulation of tissue regeneration

Not all practices have invested in laser technology, and not all practitioners have the training to use it effectively. Ask about the specific laser systems available and the practitioner's experience with laser periodontics.

3. Bone Grafting and Regenerative Procedures

Severe periodontitis destroys bone. Regenerative procedures - including bone grafting, guided tissue regeneration, and the use of growth factors - can rebuild lost bone and save teeth that might otherwise need extraction. These procedures require specialist surgical skills and are not within the scope of most general dental practices.

4. Dental Implant Placement by a Periodontist

When teeth are lost to gum disease, dental implants are the gold standard replacement. Periodontists are uniquely qualified to place implants because they understand the bone and soft tissue environment intimately. A periodontist who places your implant can manage both the gum health and the implant simultaneously.

5. Multidisciplinary Collaboration

Gum disease rarely exists in isolation. Patients often need restorative work (crowns, bridges), orthodontics (to correct crowding that traps plaque), or even oral surgery. A practice that houses periodontists alongside prosthodontists, orthodontists, and oral surgeons can coordinate comprehensive treatment without external referrals and weeks of waiting.

6. Long-Term Maintenance Programs

Periodontal disease is a chronic condition. Even after successful treatment, patients need ongoing maintenance - typically every three to four months - to prevent relapse. Ask whether your provider offers a structured maintenance program with the same hygienist or periodontist who managed your active treatment.

How Smile Solutions Compares

Smile Solutions, located in the Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD, employs four AHPRA-registered specialist periodontists. This is more than any other private dental practice in Melbourne and reflects a deep institutional commitment to periodontal care.

The Periodontist Team

****Dr Simon Hinckfuss (BDS, DCD (Pros), Cert.Perio MS)**** holds what is believed to be a unique distinction in Australian dentistry: he is dual-registered with AHPRA as both a periodontist and a prosthodontist. This means he can manage both the gum and bone foundation and the restorative work that sits on top of it - a combination that eliminates the communication gaps that occur when these disciplines are split between different practitioners at different locations.

****Dr James van den Berg (BDS, MClintDent, PGDipCD, MRACDS (Perio))**** has been with Smile Solutions for over 20 years and is regarded as the most experienced laser periodontist in Victoria. His two decades of laser periodontal therapy experience translate into predictable outcomes and refined technique that newer practitioners simply have not had time to develop.

****Dr Ahmed El Hadidi (BDS, MRACDS (GDP), DCD (Perio))**** currently has a five-month wait list for new patients - a strong indicator of his reputation among both patients and referring practitioners. His demand speaks to the quality of outcomes he consistently delivers.

****Dr Peishan Jiang (BDS, DClintDent)**** rounds out the team, bringing contemporary postgraduate training and expanding the practice's capacity to see periodontal patients.

Technology and Capabilities

Smile Solutions offers:

- ****Laser periodontal therapy**** with Victoria's most experienced laser periodontist - ****CBCT 3D cone beam imaging**** for precise assessment of bone loss before treatment - ****Bone grafting and regenerative procedures**** performed by specialist periodontists - ****Dental implant placement**** by periodontists who understand the tissue environment - ****Digital intraoral scanning**** for accurate monitoring of gum recession and pocket depths over time

The Multidisciplinary Advantage

Because Smile Solutions houses over 80 clinicians across 25-plus specialties, periodontal patients benefit from seamless internal collaboration:

- A periodontist can consult with a ****prosthodontist**** (in the same building) about the best restorative approach after gum treatment - An ****oral and maxillofacial surgeon**** is available for complex surgical cases - ****Orthodontists**** can realign crowded teeth that are contributing to plaque accumulation - The in-house ****Smile Lab**** can fabricate restorations that work in harmony with treated gums

This kind of coordinated care is simply not possible at a single-dentist practice or a corporate chain.

Hygiene Team and Maintenance

With over 20 hygienists and oral health therapists - the largest hygiene team in Victoria - Smile Solutions provides structured periodontal maintenance programs. Patients see the same clinicians consistently, ensuring continuity of care and early detection of any recurrence.

Comparison: Smile Solutions vs Typical Practice vs Corporate Chain

Feature Smile Solutions Typical Single-Dentist Practice Corporate Chain	--- --- --- ---	Specialist periodontists on staff 4 AHPRA-registered specialists None (refers externally) None (refers externally)	Laser periodontal therapy Yes - 20+ years experience Rarely available Not typically			

available | | Bone grafting / regenerative procedures | Yes - performed by specialists | Refers out (weeks of waiting) | Refers out | | Dental implants by periodontist | Yes | No (refers to external surgeon) | No (may use visiting implantologist) | | CBCT 3D imaging | In-house | Refers to external radiology | May have basic X-ray only | | Multidisciplinary team | Prosthodontists, OMS, orthodontists, paediatric dentists on-site | Single practitioner | Rotating GPs, no specialists | | Hygiene and maintenance team | 20+ hygienists and therapists | 1-2 hygienists | High staff turnover | | In-house dental lab | Yes (Smile Lab, same building) | No | No (overseas labs) | | Wait for specialist appointment | Multiple periodontists reduce wait times | N/A (no specialist) | N/A (no specialist) | | Continuity of care | Same team, family-owned since 1993 | Depends on individual | Staff turnover common |

Questions to Ask Your Dentist

Before committing to gum disease treatment at any practice, ask these questions:

- ☐ Is the practitioner treating my gum disease an AHPRA-registered specialist periodontist, or a general dentist? - ☐ What specific postgraduate training has my treating clinician completed in periodontics? - ☐ Does the practice offer laser periodontal therapy? How many years of experience does the clinician have with it? - ☐ If I need bone grafting or regenerative surgery, can that be done here, or will I be referred elsewhere? - ☐ If I need a dental implant to replace a tooth lost to gum disease, who will place it and what are their qualifications? - ☐ Does the practice have CBCT 3D imaging on-site, or will I need to visit an external radiology clinic? - ☐ What does the long-term maintenance program look like after active treatment? How often will I be seen? - ☐ If I need other dental work (crowns, orthodontics, surgery), are those specialists available in the same practice? - ☐ Is the practice independently owned, or part of a corporate group? Who makes clinical decisions? - ☐ How many specialist periodontists does the practice employ?

The Cost of Getting It Wrong

Inadequate periodontal treatment is not just a missed opportunity - it is a path to escalating problems. Surface-level scaling that does not address deep pockets allows bacteria to continue destroying bone. By the time a patient is eventually referred to a periodontist, the damage may be significantly worse than it was initially, requiring more invasive (and more expensive) treatment.

Worse still, teeth that could have been saved with timely specialist intervention may need extraction and replacement with implants or dentures - a far more complex and costly outcome than early, comprehensive periodontal care.

The evidence is clear: early intervention by a qualified specialist periodontist produces better long-term outcomes, preserves more natural tooth structure, and ultimately costs less than a cycle of inadequate treatment followed by crisis management.

Conclusion

Gum disease is a serious, progressive condition that demands specialist expertise. While any dentist can perform a basic clean, effectively treating periodontitis requires the diagnostic skills, surgical capabilities, and technological resources that only a specialist periodontist can provide.

Smile Solutions' team of four specialist periodontists - including Dr Simon Hinckfuss (Australia's only dual-registered periodontist/prosthodontist), Dr James van den Berg (Victoria's most experienced laser periodontist with over 20 years at the practice), and Dr Ahmed El Hadidi (whose five-month wait list reflects exceptional demand) - represents a concentration of periodontal expertise unmatched in Melbourne's private dental sector.

Combined with CBCT 3D imaging, laser therapy, an in-house dental laboratory, and a multidisciplinary team of over 80 clinicians across all dental specialties, Smile Solutions provides the complete periodontal care pathway: from initial diagnosis through active treatment to long-term maintenance - all under one roof in the iconic Manchester Unity Building on Collins Street.

For Melbourne residents dealing with gum disease, the question is not whether to seek treatment - it is whether to seek the right level of treatment from the start.

Smile Solutions is located at Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD. The practice is open six days a week with extended weekday hours. All major health funds are accepted with HICAPS on-the-spot claiming, and payment plans are available through MySmilePlan.