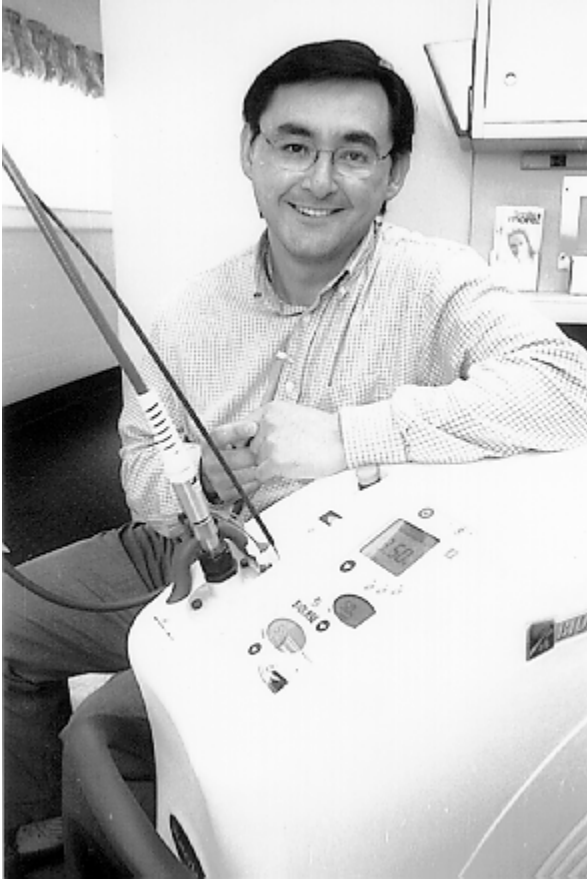


State of the Art in Dentistry: Waterlase

By GREG BAPTISTA

May 2, 2003



Dr. Christopher Walinski and the Waterlase dental laser.

FALL RIVER - If you watch the Discovery Channel to learn about the latest in medical technology or read *Forbes* or *Business Week* to keep up on the country's hottest corporations, you've probably heard about Waterlase, a revolutionary dental product produced by a company called BioLase Technology.

Waterlase has people talking all over the nation, and it's made BioLase one of the fastest-growing companies in America. By taking laser dentistry to a new level, the Waterlase system has given dentists the ability to perform a range of major procedures without causing any real pain to their patients. With word about Waterlase spreading, many people who face traditionally painful procedures are actively seeking dentists that are using it. And while more and more dentists across the country are exploring the new technology, right now people really have only one choice in this area if they want to reap the benefits of laser dentistry: Dr. Christopher J. Walinski.

Dr. Walinski operates Dentistry in the Highlands, located at 673 Robeson Street. He has always kept up with advances in technology by offering, for example, the latest in cosmetic dental procedures. But his foray into the use of lasers has set his practice apart from all the others nearby.

"I'm one of the only dentists in Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island to use lasers," he said. Consequently, Walinski treats not just people in the Fall River area, but also people who are willing to travel for the promise of pain-free dentistry. "People are driving an hour and a half or two hours to come down and use the Waterlase," he said.

He finds that people are hearing about Waterlase through a variety of sources: television, business magazines, fitness magazines like *Men's Health*, and of course, the internet. So there really aren't any geographic limits for people who are interested and excited about the new technology. Because of his own presence on the internet at www.laser-dentistry.org, many of these people contact Walinski himself to find out more about the Waterlase. "I get people e-mailing from literally around the world," he said.

So what are all these people hearing? What exactly is the Waterlase? "It's a laser device," Walinski said, but the laser itself does very little of the cutting. "The laser energizes water droplets," he explained. "The water is what actually causes much of the cutting of the hard and soft tissue."

Lasers had been used in dental procedures before the Waterlase came along, Walinski said, but their applications were limited. "Older lasers heated up the tooth so much during the procedure that they would kill the nerve, and patients would end up needing root canals." As a result, he said, most of the early lasers were only used for gum surgery.

But the Waterlase uses a high-powered, laser-energized water spray instead, and the water prevents the tooth from heating up much at all.

With traditional dental instruments, the heat of friction is what causes a lot of the pain in most procedures, Walinski said. Also, vibrations from the instruments can cause tiny fractures in teeth; these lead to weaknesses that can cause teeth to break long after the surgery. Plus, he added, there is that horribly unsettling drill sound.

Waterlase has none of these drawbacks. There is nothing to cause friction or vibration, so there's no immediate pain or long-term weakness in teeth. And there's just a mild popping sound -- much more relaxing than the dreaded drill.

In addition, Walinski said, "the laser energy seals the blood vessels, lymph vessels and nerve endings, and it sterilizes everything it touches." That means the dentist can perform gum surgery with very little bleeding, less swelling and less chance for infection.

And because there's no pain, there's no need for Novocain. "You can get procedures done without the needle and without the numbness afterwards," Walinski said. "That's what's so revolutionary."

Waterlase can be used for a wide range of dental procedures, including root canals, filling preparations, and various periodontal procedures. It can desensitize sensitive teeth, and trim back gum tissue to improve uneven smiles.

The device can also offer instant relief for cold sores and fever blisters; that can be particularly helpful for cancer patients who frequently get painful blisters, Walinski said. This kind of procedure is quick, he added -- "It's done in about 30 seconds."

"And all this without Novocain," Walinski reiterated.

Walinski knows a lot about the Waterlase and what it can do because he's more than just one dentist out of a growing number to use it. He was one of the earlier dentists to incorporate the Waterlase into his practice, and since then, he's become essentially an expert on the system.

He explained that for a while, every time a dentist would purchase a Waterlase system, they would call Walinski to get advice on how to best use it. At some point, he realized it would be easier to put his knowledge down on paper and make it available to these newer Waterlase users.

The result was a 60-page instructional manual, complete with pictures, called *The Waterlase Clinical Techniques Manual*. This little publication may not hit the New York Times bestseller list, but it has certainly established Walinski as one of the most laser-savvy dentists in the country.

Though the Waterlase is a major focus of Walinski's practice these days, he also performs a range of purely cosmetic dental procedures. These include crowns, porcelain veneers that cover dark, chipped or crooked teeth, and LaserSmile, a quick and efficient laser for whitening teeth, also produced by BioLase.

Dentistry in the Highlands can be reached by phone at 508-676-8268, or visit www.laser-dentistry.org.

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