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## Lingualcare braces for industry change

*Orthodontic procedure hides 'metal mouth' behind the tongue*

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Staff Writer

ADDISON — An Addison company plans to open what it calls a first-of-its-kind clinic to make available a new approach to straightening teeth by putting braces on the tongue side of the teeth.

Some 50 patients in the United States and around 600 in Germany already are undergoing orthodontic care using the system sold by Lingualcare.

It customizes for each patient's teeth two elements of braces that were previously done on a more one-size-fits-all approach: brackets, which are glued behind teeth, and wires, which exert force to push the teeth to the desired positions.

So-called lingual orthodontics has been around since the 1970s and have the benefit of keeping braces hidden behind the teeth. But linguals have largely remained a niche area of orthodontics in the United States, mostly relegated to adult patients. Of the St. Louis-based American Association of Orthodontists' membership, only 9.75%, or 831 doctors, do lingual braces.

So-called "labial" braces, which fit around each individual tooth, have remained predominant partly because they cost less — around \$5,000 to \$6,000, compared to \$7,000 to \$8,000 for linguals.

There are other issues that linguals present, such as tougher cleaning, longer treatment and, at least initially, an affect on speech and the tongue. Lingual braces are more difficult for orthodontists to apply, as they are placed in a confined area of the mouth and thus make it difficult for doctors to see what they're doing.

Lingualcare officials maintain their approach reduces many of the problems associated with older versions of lingual braces.

"We've made brackets that mold to the patients' teeth. They're easier to talk with and won't tear up the tongue when eating," says Chief Executive Lea Nesbit. She adds that most patients will finish a Lingualcare-based treatment in 12 to 18 months, though that could vary from less than a year to as long as two years. Nesbit estimates conventional braces typically take 24 months, with some doctors finishing faster.

The system works by taking a putty-silicon mold of the patients' teeth and, using a laboratory procedure, setting up a goal for the teeth fitting perfectly together.

The perfect-teeth goal is scanned using three-dimensional lasers into a software system, which designs gold-alloy brackets based on the anatomy of the teeth.

The company's 4,000-square-foot "center of excellence" clinic, located on Belt Line Road east of the Dallas North Tollway, is the first of four that Lingualcare hopes to build nationwide in the next 18 months to two years. In addition to making the treatment available to patients, the clinic — in the same building that the company's headquarters are being moved into — will be used to teach orthodontists about the Lingualcare system.

Lingualcare says six Metroplex orthodontists are certified to use its system. Dr. Clifton Alexander, who is one of them, is a fan.

"We've got seven patients in treatment" with the Lingualcare system, says Alexander, who shares offices in Dallas and Coppell with his father, Dr. C. Moody Alexander, who also is certified in the system. "They absolutely love it."

Both men will treat patients at the Lingualcare clinic. The senior Alexander is former chair of the Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas.

Lingualcare makes money by selling its system to orthodontists; so far, 24 practices are using the company's system of brackets, wires and trays. The system will also be distributed to orthodontists by another firm called Ormco.

Nesbit says Lingualcare has raised about \$1 million from an unnamed German institutional investor and friends and family. Nesbit says the company will seek to be profitable rather than raise venture capital, though it is looking to do additional fund-raising in Europe.

Lingualcare buys wires from Richardson-based Orametrix, an orthodontics-technology firm that three of Lingualcare's co-founders were part of in the late '90s. The system that Lingualcare sells was developed in Germany, and the company has exclusive North and South American rights to it.

Staff Writer Stephanie Patrick contributed to this report.

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**HIDING OUT:** Lingualcare Chief Executive Lea Nesbit says the new clinic will teach orthodontists the company's system for applying braces on the tongue side of teeth.