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Dentist Kevin Barrett Works To Prevent Snoring

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Staff Writer

The wealthy are building a new room in their mansions: a snoratoria, where a person can peacefully snore and not keep a spouse awake.

Pierre Stooss, a Hollywood estate agent, was quoted in a United Kingdom paper as saying the rooms are growing in popularity. "Sometimes it just starts off as a temporary measure, but then word spreads and now everyone with the space wants one," he said.

Longtime Palisadian and Brentwood dentist Kevin Barrett said that a healthier and cheaper plan is to correct snoring by using an orthodontic device that is placed nightly in the mouth of the snorer.

Experts estimated that about 45 percent of people snore occasionally, while 25 percent are habitual snorers.

"Snoring can be the result of sleep apnea," said Barrett, who explained that when a person lies on their back, the jaw relaxes and the back of the tongue falls to the back of the throat, producing an air obstruction that causes the person to snore.

He said apnea is the equivalent of holding your breath five to 10 times an hour. The brain realizes the body is being deprived of oxygen and causes the heart to work faster.

"People wake up tired because their heart has had to work hard all night," Barrett said. "Snoring is not normal, and some experts believe it can cut as much as 10 years off your life."

Barrett, a 1967 Palisades High graduate, said he first became interested in sleep apnea because he snored. "I've had it for most of my life, but it gets worse as you age.

"Studies have associated long-term sleep deficits with significant health problems," said Bar-

rett, who recommends "The Harvard Medical School Guide to a Good Night's Sleep" to those who want to learn more about snoring.

According to the book, sleep deprivation for one night has the same effect on driving ability as a .10 alcohol level; one of the most dangerous side effects of sleep deprivation is driving accidents.

"Ninety percent of the people who snore don't know they do," said Barrett, noting that the volume of snoring can be as high as 150 decibels—the equivalent to the sound of a jet plane. "We usually see a person because a spouse sends them."

Snorers are given an instrument to wear at night that looks like a watch and measures oxygen fluctuation. They also fill out a survey.

The apnea is ranked on an index: with 5 to 15 considered mild apnea, 15 to 30, moderate, and more than 30, severe. The results are sent to a sleep specialist, who then prescribes either a CPAP (Continuous Positive Air Pressure) device that looks a little like a 1940's gas mask, or an oral appliance (made by a dentist). Medicare and regular medical insurance cover both devices.

Barrett said that about 50 percent of CPAP wearers eventually trade to an oral appliance.

"They switch because they sweat underneath it or they are allergic to plastic. It takes a while to get used to the fit," Barrett said. "There is also the slight sound of the constant air being pumped."

Barrett stresses that snoring is a serious medical condition. "A lot of people take drugs such as Ambien or Benadryl to go to sleep because they think they have insomnia," he said, noting that often the real sleep problem is apnea, and once that is corrected people stop using drugs.



Dr. Kevin Barrett can design an orthodontic device that may prevent snoring.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

Those who are overweight are more likely to snore, and anyone who is seriously trying to lose weight is counseled to make sure they are receiving enough sleep. Since apnea causes oxygen fluctuation, that same fluctuation can also disturb the insulin release in the body.

"When someone dies in their sleep, it's possible they've had sleep apnea their whole life," Barrett said.

Once snoring is corrected, "I get a lot of thanks from spouses

and partners," said Barrett, who graduated from UCLA and then USC Dental School. His practice has been located at 11980 San Vicente Blvd. in Brentwood for 34 years.

Barrett and wife Lynn have two children: Sean, who works for HMI Capital, a hedge fund in San Francisco, and Michelle, who is an executive assistant at Rearden Commerce, also in San Francisco.

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