Keynote’s Olympic Connection

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With the British Dental Bleaching Society’s 2012 AGM taking place on the eve of the London Olympic Games, it is a fitting coincidence that keynote speaker Dr. Bruce Matis has more than one personal Olympic connection. Not only was he a member of the Torch Relay Team in the run up to the Atlanta Games in 1996, but as a child aged just nine in Finland he was used as a translator for the USA’s women’s team during the 1952 Helsinki Games.

Currently Director of the Clinical Research Section at the Indiana University School of Dentistry, Dr. Matis has reviewed the clinical research into possible tooth damage caused by bleaching. “Most lab bench studies showed a loss of micro-hardness in teeth after bleaching, but there was no in vivo research, and in the lab there is no saliva or pellicle to protect the teeth. When we studied teeth that had been bleached in the mouth prior to extraction, we found there was no evidence of loss of micro-hardness. Clearly, the importance of in vivo research cannot be underestimated in relation to dental bleaching.”

After examining histological changes to pulp in patients who had bleached their teeth, mild pulpal changes were observed in 17 per cent of cases. These changes were insufficient to cause lasting change, suggesting that post bleaching pulpal changes are transitory.

One temporary effect experienced after tooth whitening is sensitivity. “If I could develop the tooth blanket that patients ask for, I’d make a fortune!” says Dr Matis. Sensitivity affects 50-75 per cent of whitening patients and it’s important for all involved to understand that “bleach is a concentrated chemical and results are time dependent - a higher concentration will cause more sensitivity but most sensitivities will cease once bleaching ceases.” If patients are already experiencing tooth sensitivity, it is important that the dental professional performing the procedure achieves the appropriate balance between the concentration of the whitening agent and the period of application.

A move by the US Federal Trade Commission to allow unqualified operatives to offer tooth whitening in shopping centre kiosks in the state of Georgia is causing concern to both Dr. Matis and the ADA. “I’m very afraid that if we allow unqualified people with minimal scientific information to offer dental bleaching then patients will not get accurate information on the indications and contraindications on whitening teeth.” Whether this will also be allowed in other states is not yet known.