Interview with Dr Bendicht Scheidegger and Dr Hans-Peter Frei

“Teeth and ice hockey sticks do not get well together.”

When Dr Frei was chosen to lead the emergency dental unit during the Championship, he asked me to draw up plans for it. The 52 games played over the 17 days of the Championship are equal to a season of the Swiss Ice Hockey League. Besides the injuries in the games, we also treat players during training sessions, as well as all the other staff members of all eight qualified teams. In total, we provide dental care to 500 to 400 people – which is quite a workload!

Our team consists of Dr Frei, Marco Frei, two assistants and me.

Are you paid for your services?

Dr Scheidegger: Our work during the Championship is voluntary, and we are only paid for certain treatments and our expenses. But as a fanatic ice hockey fan, I benefit through being able to watch all the games.

Do you cooperate with the dental clinics of the University of Bern and do you admit players to them, if necessary?

Dr Scheidegger: Of course. A player is admitted to the University dental clinic if the jawbone has sustained an injury that is more serious than a dislocation. The specialists there can make decisions and take measures for which we are not qualified.

How does the dental emergency unit work?

Dr Scheidegger: During a game, we have to decide quickly if the player needs further treatment or is able to play. What we can do on-site, for example, is treat intra-oral soft tissue injuries caused by blows to the mouth guard, and seal open injuries of the dentine. After dislocations and avulsion, bones are immediately set or splinted in the dental office. Fractures with pulp exposure are treated provisionally or later in the dental office.

What do you do when a tooth is knocked out?

Dr Scheidegger: Teeth that are fragmentated or avulsed are stored in ice water, for example, in special tooth rescue boxes like the SOS Zahnrettungsbox by Hagèr & Werks. Avulsed teeth are set on-site, if possible, and provisionally splinted while the player is prepared for transit.

Who pays for your charges?

Dr Scheidegger: All the players are covered by insurance and the International Ice Hockey Federation requires every player to give proof of insurance. Our charges are reimbursed through these insurance policies.

Does treatment usually continue after the games?

Dr Scheidegger: Owing to the charged environment, players are very resistant to pain during a game. In the dental chair, this changes immediately. If we decide upon a special treatment, we admit the patient to our practice in Bümpliz near Bern, where another dentist is on standby. When injuries turn out to be more serious than originally appeared, we treat the patient either after the game or the next day when the practice opens.

When does final treatment take place?

Dr Frei: In most cases after the end of the player’s career. We do not take special measures here and act in accordance with traumatology guidelines.

Johannes Eschmann: Dr Frei, Marco Frei, two assistants and me.

Currently, 400 ice hockey players are battling for an Ice Hockey World Championship victory in Bern in Switzerland. Dental and facial trauma during the games are frequent. Dental Tribune Switzerland Editor-in-Chief Johannes Eschmann took a look behind the scenes where he spoke with Dr Bendicht Scheidegger and Dr Hans-Peter Frei who are heading the emergency dental unit at the Championship.

Johannes Eschmann: Did you become involved in this year’s Championship?

Dr Scheidegger: From 2005 to 2008, I assisted Hans-Peter Frei, who is a dentist for the Swiss hockey club SC Bern. His practice provides dental services during league games, which is where I had the opportunity to treat several emergency cases.

Hans-Peter Frei: I have been doing this job since 2006 and have had the opportunity to treat several emergency cases.