Burn notice

FDA warning focuses attention on maintenance of electric dental handpieces

By Matt Connor
Managing Editor

In the wake of a recent Food and Drug Administration warning about the use of electric handpieces, dentists nationwide are urged to maintain their devices regularly and according to manufacturers’ recommendations.

“Over the last few years we have heard about electric handpieces that have burned patients,” said Ron Appel, vice president and general manager of the Henry Schein’s Repair Business Group. “However we are not aware of any significant instances where this occurred with our repair customers.”

He is quick to add that: “The primary reason is unfamiliarity with how critical it is to properly maintain electric handpieces, as most U.S. dentists are accustomed to air-driven models. Also with many dentists not being trained on it in school adds to the potential risk. Proper maintenance of the handpiece combined with periodic certification will reduce the possibility of patient burns.”

Appel said that for many dentists, the handpiece is “the heart and soul of many treatments.”

Norway, Sweden ban use of dental mercury

Norway recently announced a ban on dental amalgam mercury. Dentists in Sweden and Denmark followed suit.

Oral implications of osteoporosis

Study evidence supports the contention that individuals with osteoporosis may be at increased risk for the manifestations of oral osteoporosis.

Lions of dentistry

D. Walter Cohen, Art Dugoni, Tony Volpe, and Stan Bergman are among the rare visionary leaders that stand out like lions of the profession.

Experts analyze risks from diagnostic procedures

Diagnostic procedures that expose dental patients to small amounts of radiation are generally safe and their benefits usually outweigh their risks. Dangers from diagnostic procedures also are decreasing as those technologies evolve. Nevertheless, dentists need to exercise caution when exposing patients to X-rays.

Mark S. Wolff, DDS, PhD, professor and chair, department of cariology and comprehensive care at New York University College of Dentistry, says that whenever ionizing radiation is used, there is some risk to patients.

“The risk may be small, but there is a risk,” he says.