Maintenance is key to preventing burns with dental handpieces

The recent government warning about burns from electronic dental handpieces has prompted manufacturers to urge dentists to make sure the devices are properly maintained and serviced.

When used properly, the electronic handpieces pose no risk to patients and offer dentists performance advantages over older, air-driven models, but if electronic handpieces become worn down or clogged, they can overheat, putting patients at risk.

Ron Appel, vice president and general manager of Henry Schein’s repair business group, says the main cause of burns from electronic handpieces is unfamiliarity with how critical it is to maintain the devices properly, especially because most dentists in the U.S. are accustomed to handpieces that are air-driven.

Schein offers a certification program under which dentists can send their electrics to the company to make sure the instruments are running according to correct specifications.

Properly maintaining handpieces and periodically certifying their performance will reduce the risk of patients getting burned, Appel says.

Many American dentists are used to handpieces driven by an air turbine. Those handpieces, which are still the most popular models in the U.S. according to Schein, become sluggish when bearings and gears become worn, signaling to the dentist that repair or replacement may be necessary.

However, when an electric handpiece gets worn or clogged, its motor increases the power sent to its head to maintain performance. This increased power rapidly generates heat that can burn patients who may be anesthetized and not feel any discomfort until after they have been injured.

Appel says Schein has the largest dental handpiece repair business in the world. “In the U.S. alone, we repair upwards of 500 dental handpieces a day,” he notes.

“A small portion of those are electric handpieces. The reason is that electric handpieces still have a small market share in the U.S. But we believe that its share will steadily increase as the U.S. dentist becomes more familiar with the electric handpiece technology and realizes it has greater capability than typical air-driven handpieces.”

Adds Kent Eggleston, director of Henry Schein’s handpiece business, “The electric handpiece is basically a system that consists of a control box, a motor and attachments. What the dentist does is put on a different attachment, which is procedure-specific. This system is flexible, allowing the practitioner to perform a full range of procedures, from cutting tooth structure with a high-speed attachment all the way down to an endodontic file that oscillates at a very slow rate. So it gives you the full capability to do any type of dental handpiece procedure.”

As the largest practice-based dental supplier in the U.S., Henry Schein saw a need in the early 1990s to develop a service and repair business for the devices it sold. Appel says the dental handpiece “happens to be a perfect scenario where a repair service is required. If you sell the product, you need to service the product. Since dentists have dramatically increased the number of times they sterilize their handpieces, it has caused a dramatic increase in the amount of maintenance and repair work needed per dental handpiece.”

As electric handpieces grow in popularity—sales of the devices are currently growing at double-digit rates—and as more and more dentists switch from air turbine technology to electric, dental professionals need to be aware that electric handpieces also require increased vigilance and maintenance.

Eggleston stresses that much of the problem is related to education and training. “You have many people who have been air users converting over to electric,” he says. “A doctor who has been practicing for 10 years with air has no perspective, no idea that his handpiece can burn his patient. It’s foreign to him.”

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Medical-dental dialogue examines issues

The New York Academy of Sciences recently hosted “a medical-dental dialogue on the relationship between periodontal disease and systemic health.”

The event was jointly sponsored by the academy in conjunction with the Columbia University College of Dental Medicine, the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the National Periodontal Disease Coalition.

Speakers analyzed possible links between periodontal disease and atherosclerotic vascular disease, adverse pregnancy outcomes and kidney disease, as well as the role of dental professionals in the diagnosis and management of patients with systemic diseases, and whether medical and dental education and practice need to be integrated more closely.

Although links between periodontal disease and other health problems are not always direct and clear cut, researchers see periodontal disease as a contributing factor for many health problems. In recent years, a number of studies have linked periodontal disease to atherosclerotic vascular disease.

Dr. Steven Shea, MD, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, outlined data from a multi-ethnic study on risk factors for subclinical cardiovascular disease.

Justice Department cracks down on Medicare fraud

The Department of Justice is claiming success in its fight against Medicare fraud. Since the start of the year, the owners of nine health care corporations in the greater Miami, Florida, area have been sentenced to prison.

The government says the nine defendants collectively filed fraudulent claims with Medicare for $56,599,832 worth of unnecessary durable medical equipment (DME) and infusion therapy.

“The Department of Justice places a high priority on investigating and prosecuting those who steal tax payer money intended to provide health care for the elderly and disabled,” says Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher. “We have dedicated a team of experienced prosecutors to focus on Medicare and other healthcare fraud around the country.”

ADA Foundation receives massive donation

The American Dental Association (ADA) Foundation has received 6 million shares of Suni Medical Imaging Inc. stock from Paul Suni, the company’s founder. On its website, ADA says it will use the stock to provide scholarships under the ADA Foundation’s student dental scholarship program.

The Suni scholarships, in contrast to traditional ones, will require applicants to show they are dedicated to the arts as well as to dentistry. Suni considers people involved in both the arts and the sciences to be especially valuable to society.

“For the past 15 years, it has been the dental profession that has supported my family and the families of Suni employees by purchasing products developed and manufactured by the Suni team,” ADA’s website quotes Suni as saying. “My emotional impetus for making a charitable contribution was to give back to the dental profession after a personally meaningful 20-year experience in developing enabling technologies for dentistry.”

ADA and UCLA decline to comment on possible lawsuit

The American Dental Association (ADA) and the UCLA School of Dentistry are declining to comment on reports that 15 students in the UCLA dental program have filed a lawsuit against the ADA in Los Angeles Superior Court.

The plaintiffs allege they were falsely accused of helping others cheat on a national dental exam. They are seeking financial compensation and a restraining order against disciplinary action while the cheating allegations are reviewed by ADA’s Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations.

The students could have their passing scores from the 2006 exam thrown out and be barred from retaking the test until 2009, according to an article in the Los Angeles Times.

On November 14, 2007, ADA issued a release saying its 15-member Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations (JCNE) “routinely conducts investigations when it receives allegations about irregularities that might jeopardize the integrity of the National Board Dental Examinations.”

ADA’s statement that “investigations are conducted in a confidential manner and the JCNE does not comment on allegations or investigations” was in response to published reports that it was investigating possible cheating by students at UCLA, as well as at other schools.
ADA gears up for a strong Give Kids A Smile effort

The American Dental Association (ADA) is championing February as National Children’s Dental Health Month. On February 1, as part of ADA’s sixth annual Give Kids A Smile (GKAS) program, more than 51,000 dental professionals will provide free dental services to more than 500,000 children from low-income families at more than 2,000 sites throughout the country.

ADA notes that tooth decay—five times more common than asthma—is the most common chronic disease affecting American children, according to the U.S. Surgeon General, and recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that tooth decay is on the rise among preschoolers, reversing half a century of progress.

“Dental care remains a critical unmet health care need among America’s children,” notes ADA president Mark J. Feldman. “The ADA and dentists across the nation are engaged in creating public awareness of this critical need and trying to extend access to dental care to more low-income children. To this end, we are celebrating February 1 with our sixth annual GKAS program, to help put children on the road to a lifetime of good oral health.”

ADA launched its national GKAS program to combat what the Surgeon General calls “a silent epidemic” of dental disease and to encourage parents, health professionals, policymakers and everyone who cares about children to address this health problem.

NYSDA to sponsor contest for children

During National Children’s Dental Health Month this February, the New York State Dental Association (NYSDA) will sponsor “Keeping Smiles Brighter,” a statewide contest open to children from preschool through 12th grade. Younger contestants will be asked to design a placemat that shares a message about good dental care. NYSDA has added a new category for older children in grades seven through twelve. Their task will be to design a website home page offering oral health information or a dental health message.

Entries are due March 5, 2008. Parents and children and educators can obtain contest rules, dental health resources and details about Children’s Dental Health Month events online at www.nysdental.org or by calling NYSDA at 518-465-0044.

Rewrite by John Hoffman
Based on material posted on NYSDA’s website

Studies indicate that only three out of five American children visit a dentist by the time they enter kindergarten. Because of inattention and other barriers to oral care, 52 percent of children ages six to eight have tooth decay, according to the Department of Health and Human Services’ Healthy People 2010 oral health update.

GKAS events are offered throughout the country by groups of dentists in their private practices and by individual dentists at various sites. A national centerpiece GKAS event will be held on February 1 at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine in Aurora. It will be attended by ADA board member Kenneth J. Versman, D.D.S., and ADA executive director James B. Bramson, D.D.S. Previewing the events, ADA president-elect John S. Findley, D.D.S., will appear on a number of morning television programs on Thursday, January 51.

ADA is lobbying for several bills before Congress aimed at strengthening access to oral care. These include the Children’s Dental Health Improvement Act of 2007 and H.R. 2711, known as “Deamonte’s Law,” named for Deamonte Driver, a twelve-year-old child who died in Maryland from an untreated abscess.

In 2008, the Colgate-Palmolive Company will supply 500,000 toothbrushes and tubes of toothpaste for GKAS events; DEXIS Digital X-ray will offer the use of one DEXIS Digital X-ray system to each U.S. dental school participating in GKAS, as well as support staff to assist in the taking of X-rays; and Henry Schein Dental will provide professional dental kits containing such products as gloves, masks, patient bibs, dental floss, prophylastic paste and fluoride gel, foam and varnish.

John Hoffman rewrite of a news announcement submitted by the American Dental Association
Beeber issues petition against fluoridation

While the American Dental Association (ADA) continues to champion water fluoridation as a means of controlling tooth decay, opponents of fluoridation continue to dispute fluoride’s effectiveness and lobby for its removal from municipal water supplies.

On January 25, 65 years after sodium fluoride was added to the public water supply of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Paul Beeber, president of the New York State Coalition Opposed to Fluoridation, issued an online petition to end fluoridation and call for a congressional hearing.

Charging that “Americans are fluoride overdosed, suffer from fluoride’s toxic effects, and cavity rates are rising,” Beeber says Grand Rapids “has a moral obligation to stop fluoridation instead of glorifying it.”

“The Grand Rapids experiment [adding fluoride to its water supply in 1945] never proved fluoridation was effective and didn’t even look for adverse health effects,” Beeber charges in his petition. “Grand Rapids children are showing high rates of tooth decay and fluoride overdose.”

He charges that despite widespread water fluoridation, one out of every four third graders in Michigan has untreated dental decay, and low-income children have significantly higher rates of untreated dental decay.

He notes that the state of Michigan is now 86 percent fluoridated and Detroit is 100 percent fluoridated, yet in Detroit, 85 percent of low-income African-American adults, 14-years-old and over, have severe tooth decay, and nearly all of Detroit’s African-American 3-year-olds have cavities.

“Obviously, fluoridation has not reduced or leveled out tooth decay rates between poor and non-poor Michigan children,” he says. “Instead, Michigan children are unnecessarily being exposed to fluoride which is linked to bone, thyroid, kidney and tooth damage.”

He argues that in the early 1900s, discolored but decay resistant teeth were prevalent in healthier, wealthier U.S. populations drinking and irrigating their crops with water containing fluoride as well as calcium and other minerals.

“Researchers discovered fluoride was the tooth discoloring culprit and mistakenly thought fluoride was also the cavity-fighting hero—unaware that calcium was required to grow bone,” says Beeber.

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“Researchers discovered fluoride was the tooth discoloring culprit and mistakenly thought fluoride was also the cavity-fighting hero—unaware that calcium was required to grow sound dentition,” he says. “Instead, researchers made a huge new discovery—something that works better than fluoride: calcium.”

Rewrite by John Hoffman of the online petition e-mailed by the New York State Coalition Opposed to Fluoridation

New study links periodontitis to heart disease

The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) reports that an article published recently in the Journal of Periodontology (JOP), AAP’s official publication, indicates that periodontal patients whose bodies show evidence of a reaction to the bacteria associated with periodontitis may face a heightened risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Although there have been many studies associating gum disease with heart disease, what we have not known is exactly why this happens and under what circumstances,” notes JOP editor Kenneth Kornman, DDS, PhD. “The findings of this new analysis of previously published studies suggest that the long-term effect of chronic periodontitis, such as extended bacterial exposure, may be what ultimately leads to cardiovascular disease.”

Researchers at Howard University reviewed 11 studies that had previously examined clinically diagnosed periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease. The researchers then analyzed the participants’ level of systemic bacterial exposure, specifically looking for the presence of the bacteria associated with periodontal disease, as well as measuring biological indicators of bacterial exposure.

They found that people with periodontal disease whose biomarkers showed greater bacterial exposure were more likely to develop coronary heart disease or atherogenesis (plaque formation in the arteries). “While more research is needed to better understand the connection between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease, this study suggests the importance of taking care of your teeth and gums and how that can help you take care of your heart,” says Susan Karabin, DDS, president of the AAP.
Michigan gears up for GKAS

The Michigan Dental Association (MDA) is gearing up for National Children’s Dental Health Month. On February 1, thousands of children throughout the state will receive free dental services ranging from dental fillings to oral health screenings and complete treatment as part of the American Dental Association’s (ADA) sixth annual Give kids a Smile (GKAS) campaign.

MDA notes that during last year’s GKAS events in Michigan, 529 dentists who belong to the association, along with hygienists, assistants and volunteers, provided dental care and oral health education to 57,310 children. MDA estimates that dental care worth more than $800,000 was provided to needy children.

“We realize there are thousands of disadvantaged children in Michigan who are not able to receive regular dental care,” notes MDA president Steve Dater, DDS.

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“We realize there are thousands of disadvantaged children in Michigan who are not able to receive regular dental care,” notes MDA president Steve Dater, DDS.

“A one-day event like GKAS is not a cure-all. It’s a wake-up call. Here in Michigan, 1 percent of the total Medicaid budget is allocated to dental services for both children and adults. Dentists want to be part of the solution, but we can’t solve the access problem on our own.”

Michigan’s Healthy Kids Dental program provides care to Medicaid-eligible children in 36 of the state’s 85 counties, and two more counties—Genesee and Saginaw—will be added later this year. “We would like to see Healthy Kids Dental available to children throughout the state,” Dater says.

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Oral flu vaccine under development

Dentists may soon be able to vaccinate patients against the flu and other illnesses. A Korean team led by Dr. Mi-Na Kweon of the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul has developed a flu vaccine that can be placed under the tongue rather than injected. The vaccine has proven successful in trials on mice, and the researchers plan to test it on humans. If successful, numerous vaccines, especially ones for upper respiratory illnesses, could be given by dentists. The research team reported its findings in the online edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Rewrite by John Hoffman
From published articles on virtually all news services

Biomaterials expert defends amalgam

Derek Jones, professor emeritus of biomaterials at Dalhousie University (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada), and chair of the International Standards Organization’s Technical Committee on Dentistry, has published an editorial in the February issue of the Journal of Dental Research defending amalgam restorations.

He considers mercury pollution from dentistry insignificant compared to mercury from natural sources and industrial use. Banning dental amalgam is a political issue that will not have any impact on total worldwide mercury pollution, he concludes.

Rewrite by John Hoffman
From a release issued by the International & American Association for Dental Research

Baghdad dean gunned down

Published reports say that Mun-thar Muheez Radhi, the dean of Baghdad University’s dental school, was gunned down while driving home from work on January 25.