Duty of Care in Paediatric Dentistry: Quality Care in General Dental Practice

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Within the practice of the profession, there are many aspects and risks in taking the ZOBB approach.

What therefore, constitutes an acceptable duty of care by dentists who care for children? In the authors’ opinion, this means a full and thorough dental examination, with the taking of bitewing radiographs whenever there is any sign of dental caries in a child’s mouth. All dental caries, generated though the enamel, require restoration. Early enamel lesions, seen clinically or on radiographs, necessitate a comprehensive preventive program based on good oral hygiene and the use of fluoride.

Restorative care must be conducted with good pain control and management of a child’s behaviour. Local anaesthesia is therefore mandatory and easily performed these days, with topical anaesthesia, fine gauge needles and short-acting local anaesthesia agents. Due consideration should be given to the use of rubber dam, which ensures a much higher quality of restorations that last for the duration of a tooth, as well as being an aid in behaviour management. Where there is pulpal involvement of primary teeth, pulpotomies or pulpectomies are essential. Such teeth also need restoration with performed metal crowns, which have repeatedly been shown to have one of the highest success rates of any restoration for children’s teeth.

Undoubtedly, the ZOBB approach can be the correct one for some children, but it is vital that this is integrated within a treatment plan that is in the best long-term interest of the child, and not an ‘easy way out’ for the dentist. If ZOBB predisposes the child to repetitive treatment and worse still, pain, abscesses and extractions under general anaesthesia, then it should be rejected in favour of comprehensive care using restorative techniques. Some of these techniques have been described in the Smile-on course: Effective Restoration for Carious Primary Molars, and which have been shown to have a low failure rate in children.

We accept that the financial constraints within the NHS (National Health Service) practice have somewhat limited the acceptance of these techniques by general dental practitioners. Maybe, the new contract will make a difference. Only time will tell.

For a dentist in this day and age to fulfil his or her obligations under ‘Duty of Care’, the philosophy of QUACC must be used. The outdated approach of ZOBB, or ‘supervised neglect’ to use a more up to date term, is a relic of the past, which should only be read about in the dental history books.

References

Please visit www.smile-on.com for information about their courses.

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