Concern grows in USA over lead in crowns from China

A n Ohio woman has claimed that high levels of lead were found in her dental crownwork, which, she says, was made in China. She had received a three-unit dental bridge and after having an adverse reaction to her dental work, and having it removed, her dentist disclosed that the work had been sent to a dental laboratory in China.

The patient then had the restoration sent to a chemical laboratory for analysis. The documentation of the dental material analysis of this patient’s restoration showed unsafe levels of lead in the porcelain on the restoration. In the wake of this report, the American Dental Association (ADA) has issued a warning.

The ADA says ‘there is no appropriate use for lead in manufacture dental prosthetics, and the association is working with the federal regulatory agencies responsible for protecting the public’s health and safety.’

“We have begun our own investigation into the safety of both foreign and domestically produced dental crowns and other dental prosthetics,” it says. “However, our investigation should not be viewed as a substitute for necessary oversight and enforcement by the federal and state government agencies responsible for protecting the public’s health and safety.”

The ADA adds that it is taking the reports ‘very seriously,’ but ‘there simply isn’t enough information available to presume that the presence of lead in dental crowns or other prostheses is widespread’.

Only 15 to 20 percent of dental prostheses used in the U.S. come from foreign labs, and China accounts for only part of that share. The Association advises patients to discuss any concerns about the safety of their dental crowns or other prosthetic devices with their dentists and suggests questions that could be asked.

UK response

The story spurred the interest of the UK media. Richard Daniels, the chief executive of the Dental Laboratories Association (DLA), told the press that the number of potentially dangerous imports was rising. ‘At this point nobody knows what the health risks are,’ he said. ‘The fact is the majority of NHS work will come from China or India in the next five years. We need to be moving towards proper regulation of the industry. It’s not just a matter for the NHS either - many of the big corporate groups also have agreements with factories in China to make their fixtures.’

David Smith, a board member of the DLA, said: ‘The worst case scenario is we’ll end up with a large number of people in the UK with mouths full of lead and they’ve got no idea that that’s the case. In theory what happened in America should never happen here as there are regulatory bodies which should prevent these problems in the UK.

‘But the truth is, if the situation isn’t addressed then it is only a matter of time before there is a similar case as in the States. We’ve watered down all the rules in such a way that you could drive a bus through them. In the end, the whole system is profiteering. Any savings made by outsourcing the work to China are never passed on to the patient.’