Dr Dominique Kanaan and Dr Zaki Kanaan shed light on the new rules, which allow hygienists and therapists to carry out whitening

D
tistry in the UK is changing and the profession is in a very dynamic phase. These changes are affecting the entire dental team and in particular dental care professionals (DCPs). The skill set of DCPs is increasing and they are now able to become practice owners. A few years ago this would not even have been a viable option.

The easing of the rules by the General Dental Council now also allows whitening to be part of the armamentarium of hygienists and therapists, as long as they have a prescription from a dentist. But what constitutes a prescription? Although there is no set format for the wording of a whitening prescription as such, according to Dental Protection, a prescription should contain enough information for the DCP to understand precisely what treatment is being prescribed and allow them to satisfy themselves that the patient’s best interest. Broadly, this should include:

2. The cause of the discoloration. (Tetracycline, age related, etc.)
3. What warnings have been given or any specific issues relating to the case (areas of recession, fluorotic white patches, difficult canines, existing restorations, etc.)
4. Concentration of active ingredient to be used (10 percent CP, 16 percent CP etc.)
5. The technique to be used (power, home or combination)
6. What follow-up or maintenance is needed?

What, when and how

According to a Mintel Survey conducted by the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry in 2006, 50 percent of all cosmetic dental procedures carried out involved whitening. Although whitening is often considered the entry level treatment for cosmetic dentistry, with the confusion that surrounds this treatment modality in the UK, it is of utmost importance that you can show that you are fully trained in carrying out this treatment and that you are acting in the patient’s best interest.

The most difficult aspect for a DCP is the ability to demonstrate that they have received appropriate training to carry out whitening. Although the GDC has not offered any specific guidance on this, it is highly recommended that a DCP should attend a recognised training course before undertaking any whitening. Although the GDC has not offered any specific guidance on this, it is highly recommended that a DCP should attend a recognised training course before undertaking any whitening.

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As with any form of dental treatment, there is no doubt that maintaining contemporaneous records, by both the prescribing dentist and DCP, is a prerequisite for successful whitening. It demonstrates the conversations and discussions that may have taken place and therefore confirms the consent process. Since more than one person is involved in the same treatment modality, the more information that is in these records, the easier it will be for your defence organisation to defend you, if the need arises.

Both the Dental Protection Society and Dental Defence Union provide cover for hygienists and therapists to carry out whitening, as long as they have undergone appropriate training. There is no additional fee for this cover from both organisations. DDS state that you should inform them in writing if you are undertaking whitening procedures and indemnity will be provided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the level of training received. DDS does not need written confirmation that a member is carrying out whitening but they emphasise that you will need to demonstrate that you have an appropriate level of training, in the event a complaint is made.

Although ultimate responsibility lies with the dentist, as they will be writing the prescription, the DCP carrying out the prescription also has to demonstrate a duty of care and must therefore satisfy themselves that the treatment being undertaken is appropriate and is in patients’ best interest, when balanced against other treatments that may be possible (including no treatment at all).

Dental hygienists and therapists are now registered professionals. With that status comes professional responsibility... to the patient, other team members and of course... themselves. Along with this comes the duty of keeping yourself up to date with relevant courses for new skills such as whitening.

Value for money

In the current climate of doom and gloom, people are more discerning with what and who they spend their hard earned cash with. It is quite likely that people will now shun more expensive cosmetic treatment options, such as veneers, and opt for the simpler and more reasonable options of whitening for any improvement they can get for the money.

We as a profession need to take note of this and what better time than embracing the new skills that our hygienists and therapists have been empowered to do and encourage them to take a hands-on whitening course. Not only will it add a new skill to their bow, but it also will give them a shot of enthusiasm.

The side effect is that it will free up the dentists’ time, allowing them to focus on the art of dentistry and running the business.

Dr Zaki and Dr Dominique Kanaan set up K2DentalSeminars.com specifically to help train hygienists and therapists in the art and science of power and home whitening. Their course is one of the few hands-on courses available and is carried out in small groups. Team up with BAGD, Dr Zaki and Dr Dominique Kanaan will be at the sixth annual conference, ‘The Future of Dentistry’ at the EICC in Edinburgh from 19-21 November 2009, where their next White Talks course take place. Bookings can be made on line at: www.badc.com.

The authors would like to acknowledge that this article is written with information provided from both the General Dental Council and the Dental Protection Society’s position statements on tooth whitening.