Sharpen your skills

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

Dentistry 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 allows whitening to be part of the armoury 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 treatment is in the patient's best interest. Broadly, this should include:

2. The cause of the discolouration.
3. What warnings have been given or any specific guidance related to the case (areas of recession, fluorotic white patches, difficult canines, existing restorations, etc.).
4. Concentration of active ingredient to be used (10 per cent CP, 16 per cent 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 per cent of all cosmetic dental procedures carried out involved home 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 these treatments 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 whitening treatments. Training can come in many guises; lecture only, live demonstrations and full hands-on training. There is no doubt that hands-on training is the best format for learning whitening techniques. This is clearly shown, in that having a rep come round from a whitening company to show you ‘how to do it’, would not be considered as appropriate training, especially for DCPs carrying out whitening for the first time. This is also true for dental colleagues or your principle who say they can show you ‘how it’s done’ in a lunch break.

After an appropriate training course, it is also suggested that initial treatments are carried out under the supervision of a dentist, followed by a dentist merely checking and assessing the outcome in the form of a logbook. It may also be advisable to demonstrate that the process and outcome had also been audited from time to time.

Keep a record

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, and as long as they have undergone appropriate training. There is no additional fee for this cover from both organisations. DDO 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. DPS 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 the grow up market will be looking at more affordable 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 way 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 also it 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. Teaming 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.bacd.com.

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About the author

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qualified from Guy’s Hospital in 1996. His main interests lie in all aspects of cosmetic dentistry, with a special interest in implant and cosmetic dentistry. He is on the Board of Directors of the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry as Chairman of the Study Club Committee and is a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. He is also an editorial consultant for Dental Implant Summaries, and is a member of the Association of Dental Implantology in the UK. He has embarked upon a career pathway leading to him gaining a diploma in sedation, a diploma in hypnosis and, most recently he has become a Licenciate of the Faculty of Homeopathy.

Dr Domique Kanaan, shortly after qualifying from Guy’s Hospital in 1996, achieved a diploma in hypnosis and most recently she has become a Licenciate of the Faculty of Homeopathy. She enjoys all aspects of dentistry, but has focused her interests in the field of cosmetic dentistry, and is well known in the cosmetic dental arena. Dominique attends cosmetic courses both nationally and internationally and is a member of both the British and American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. She currently works exclusively in private practice in London and was one of the main clinicians in Dentists’ flagship cosmetic studio in Selfridges, carrying out up to 10 whitening procedures per day.