Endodontics: a field of its own

Untreated infections can lead to the loss of teeth. This has psychological, as well as physiological, consequences with many patients reporting low self esteem and feeling embarrassed to be seen in public.

Demanding patients
Today there are two options for diseased teeth: endodontic therapy and extraction/implant placement. The rapid growth of the internet over the past decade has resulted in patients being better informed about these options and often expecting their teeth to be saved rather than extracted or replaced.

With this surge of demand from patients and advances in endodontic methods and technology, endodontics has become a recognised field of dentistry in its own right. Endodontic instruments are now so accurate that the length of a root canal can be determined to 0.5mm. This is all thanks to fibre optic illumination, minute video cameras attached to microscopes, sophisticated apex locators and ultrasonic technology.

A rapidly growing industry
The field of dentistry is continually growing and evolving; statistics show that the amount of knowledge required by a General Dental Practitioner (GDP) doubles every five years. Consequently, current undergraduate dentistry education is unable to provide the level of detail required for GDPs to feel suitably qualified to perform intricate procedures. In terms of endodontics, it is often when teeth with a more complex anatomy are involved, such as back molars, that further training is needed. For this reason, many dentists choose to follow a postgraduate route of study to specialise in the field of endodontics.

The European Society of Endodontics, a highly prestigious academy of scientists, teachers and clinicians, published guidelines for undergraduate education in endodontics. However, a recently published study in the BDJ critically commented on the coverage of the subject in dental schools throughout Europe. The same European Society of Endodontics is currently developing guidelines for postgraduate endodontic education.

The USA has progressed much further in this field. The American Association of Endodontics published strict guidelines years ago, which are followed rigorously by the majority of postgraduate dental institutions.

A new MSc in Endodontics
The University of Warwick will launch a new MSc in Endodontics in January 2010. The programme follows the American Association of Endodontics’ guidelines. It will be delivered by leading professionals, academics and researchers in the field of endodontic dentistry, and supported by respected academics from the field of continuing professional development.

As a part-time course, it has been designed to offer a flexible training pathway tailored to individual requirements and circumstances. The programme will allow students to improve and increase the scope of endodontic treatment in their practices through the study of a wide range of topics, such as tooth morphology, mechanical shaping, chemical disinfection and pain management in endodontics.

Learning will take place through traditional seminars and practical work, performed in labs and at regional training centres. Students will gain a thorough understanding of modern technologies, using materials and instruments such as surgical microscopes and cone beam CT.

Applications are being accept ed new and further information about the course can be found at www.warwick.ac.uk/go/dentistry.