Use your head for pain relief cure

The patients of all dental practitioners could benefit if more attention was paid to pain relief and conditions such as migraines, says Pav Khaira.

The very first step to treating patients with suspected migraines is the easiest one to remember, says Pav Khaira. “As dentists, we are not allowed to diagnose migraines and headaches, or to give them a classification,” says the dentist, who has a special interest in migraines and pain relief. Any dentist considering increasing the focus on pain relief offered by their own practice must keep this in mind, he says. “Whatever they do has to be done in conjunction with a GP or neurologist, or whoever the patient’s medical specialist is. That is very important. One of the first questions I ask patients when they come in to my practice for the first time is ‘Have you seen a doctor?’”

No resistance

Pav insists that keeping the patient’s doctor informed of any dental treatment is vital, and he would not provide treatment to anybody who refused him permission to contact their doctor. “But I’ve never had any resistance. I explain that I am not allowed to diagnose this kind of thing and that they have to be monitored by one of my medical colleagues. They are very, very happy with that if it offers them the prospect of being pain free,” he says.

Exclusion criteria are used to confirm that the patients are indeed suffering from migraine. “It’s a tick box process,” says Pav. “If they answer yes to x number of questions, and if the symptoms are not attributable to any other pathology, then they are classed as suffering from migraines.” The involvement of doctors

Could migraines be the answer?
Migraine sufferers don’t tend to put formal classifications on their level of headache

Careful examination can, in conjunction with the proper training, throw light on other issues too, says Pav: “It can help explain some of the more bizarre pains and sensitivities patients are having... when you understand this approach you can diagnose a lot of them. And that includes sensitivity of teeth, facial pains and neuralgias. If you understand the anatomy of what is going on you can really help. I’m not saying you can solve 100 per cent of cases, but you can offer pain relief to a lot of these patients and they are very grateful for it.”

Migraine sufferers often, due to the nature of the condition, suffer in silence. But being released from the debilitating pain of constant headaches can lead to enormous improvements in their quality of life. Migraines most commonly affect women, but sufferers can be from any walk of life.

Pav has recently encountered a patient in his teens, who was in such frequent pain that he was only attending school on average twice a week. The problem had been ongoing for three years, with the obvious implications such pain has on education. “If we can get him out of pain he can go back to school and get on with his life,” says Pav.

The second instalment of this article will look at how migraine and bruxism issues manifest themselves in the mouths of patients.