Dental patient bib holders source of bacteria

Hygiene in the dental office is a matter of course and a must for patient safety. Instruments are sterilized daily and work surfaces disinfected. Moreover, dentists and assistants wear gloves and face masks. Nonetheless, a seemingly harmless object is found wanting in terms of hygiene in many dental offices: the patient bib holder. These are often contaminated with bacteria, a recent study by Witten/Herdecke University (Germany) has shown.

Bacteria were found on 70 per cent of the bib holders. Witten/Herdecke University examined the number and type of germs found on patient napkin holders more closely. A total of 50 metal and plastic patient napkin holders were subjected to microbiological tests. The results are alarming.

Bacteria were found on 70 per cent of the bib holders, despite the fact that some of the holders were regularly cleaned and even disinfected.

The most frequently found microorganisms were staphylococci and streptococci. Also, different types of rods, pseudomonads - both types of bacteria - fungi as well as other cocci were found on individual chains. Although all were non-pathogenic bacteria, it is clear that, in principle, bacteria transfer can occur via bib chains. During a comparable study conducted by the University of North Carolina the E. coli bacterium, which can cause serious diseases, was found on napkin holders.

Risk of cross-contamination

Previous studies published in 2010 already noted the potential risk of cross-contamination. The staphylococci and streptococci mainly found in the current study occur all around us and are non-hazardous for healthy people when found in low concentrations. However, it should be noted that both types of cocci can also cause infection: staphylococci are responsible for wound infections, boils and food poisoning, while streptococci can lead to scarlet fever, endocardium inflammation and pneumonia. The detected fungal species can also trigger physical reactions such as allergies, fever or irritation of the respiratory tract if they occur in higher concentrations.

In view of the possible hazards posed by germs on patient napkin holders, the conventional practice of cleaning such utensils is unacceptable. Even if no known evidence for serious infections exists to date, a change of thinking is needed here so that no potentially contaminated napkin holders are used on patients during dental treatment.

Disposable napkin holders such as Bib-Eze™ from DUX Dental offer the solution: they are easy to handle and provide a safe alternative to traditional metal or plastic reusable holders while eliminating the contamination risk. Hygienic, disposable napkin holders are the right choice for you and your patient.

1 Study Report Witten/Herdecke University, Faculty of Health, Germany: Microbial contamination of patient bib holders, February 2012.
2 UNC School of Dentistry, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Bib Chain Contamination Study.