Single-use hand instruments

Making a case for their use in general dental practice

By Robert Jagger, UK

A wide range of single-use disposable dental and surgical instruments is now produced by a number of manufacturers. Instruments are available for purchase either singly or as procedure kits and are priced to be a realistic alternative to decontaminating reusable instruments.1

Paradoxically, single-use instrument utilisation is rarely seen as a viable alternative by dental professionals, who typically associate single-use instruments with cheap unreliable plastic devices and a very limited product range. In reality, there are mirrors, probes, restorative instruments, endodontic instruments, minor surgical instruments and extraction forces for both adult and paediatric use.

Procedure packs too are available for specific procedures and contain all of the necessary instruments. Examples of packs include those for dental and periodontal examination, restorative procedures, maxillofacial biopsy, minor oral surgery and periodontal microsurgery. This article seeks to challenge current clinician perceptions of single-use instrumentation by examining the potential benefits of high-quality single-use instruments in daily practice.

Quality

Single-use instruments can be of extremely high quality and may be almost indistinguishable in use from reusable instruments. Clinicians often comment that they are impressed by their quality and functionality and that they appear too good to throw away after just one use. These instruments are a significant step forwards from the poorer quality equivalents that were previously available.

Before selecting a supplier of single-use instruments, however, it is critical to ensure that they comply fully with all relevant British and European medical device regulation standards and that they are manufactured from medical-grade surgical steel and undergo rigorous in-process quality assurance checks and batch testing. Purchasing instruments from a supplier approved by the British Dental Industry Association will provide practitioners with assurance that they are dealing with an appropriately regulated manufacturer.

Sterilisation

One of the most significant changes to have affected the dental profession in recent years has been the adoption of rigorous sterilisation and cross-contamination procedures (HTM 01-05). Decontamination in Primary Care Databases.

Dangers posed by prion diseases, such as variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (vCJD), remain even with the most effective dental sterilisation processes. The prion associated with vCJD is able to withstand steam autoclaving under standard exposure conditions, suggesting that some reusable surgical instruments are potentially being utilised in a contaminated state. Use of single-use disposable instruments ensures that instruments are not contaminated, protecting patients and clinical staff alike.

Decontamination in Primary Care

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