The Importance of Preventing Cross-Contamination Between Dental Patients
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The possibility of cross-contamination occurring between dental patients due to the use of the saliva ejector has, in the last decade, been a topic of frequent discussion as it is an increasingly difficult problem to solve. Efficient evacuation is necessary in almost all dental treatment procedures to clear debris quickly and maintain unobstructed views within the oral cavity. Very few clinicians, however, are well informed about their evacuation systems and usually rely on their dealer to advise them. It is possible for microorganisms to heavily colonize evacuation systems. Suction lines can also support the growth of biofilms, serving as an environmental reservoir for potential pathogens. When patients close their lips around the saliva ejector forming a seal, cross-contamination can occur as previously evacuated fluid in the suction line can be drawn backwards and reach the patient’s mouth.

In April 1993, a study published in the Journal of the American Dental Association entitled Possibility of Cross-Contamination Between Dental Patients by Means of the Saliva Ejector brought the problems associated with evacuation systems out into the spotlight. To further illustrate the potential severity of this problem, the American Dental Association issued a statement asking dentists to remind their patients not to close their lips around the saliva ejector during use. Unfortunately, some patients cannot resist closing their mouth around the saliva ejector, which is especially true of younger patients. As a means to prevent the possibility of cross-contamination, it has been recommended that clinicians rinse and disinfect their evacuation lines between patients. To perform this task properly and effectively, dental professionals would need more time between patients, which is not usually possible in a busy dental practice.

Until recently, a viable solution to the problem of backflow within the low volume evacuation lines has not been available to the dental industry. The newly designed Safety Saliva Ejector Tip from Crosstex International, a simple and cost effective way to prevent this potential inter-patient cross-contamination from occurring, should change that. With the Crosstex product, venting channels are incorporated along the full length of the tip so that it is impossible for patients to form a seal around saliva ejector if and when they close their mouths causing reverse flow. The tip also prevents the suction of soft tissue, which can result in hematomas, as air is vented right to the suction site. The Crosstex Safety Saliva Ejector Tip is the only saliva ejector designed to prevent backflow from occurring and is one of the few products designed specifically to address the problem of potential cross-contamination.

Patients are not aware that they can be exposed to potentially virulent microbes. Clinicians have a responsibility to demonstrate that their current aseptic procedures (i.e. universal precautions) are safe and the use of the Crosstex Safety Saliva Ejector Tip is one way to accomplish this. One of the biggest gaps in current infection control knowledge is recognizing the risk of acquiring an infectious disease in a given situation. By recognizing and eliminating this potential risk, dentists- who hold the safety of their patients in their hands- can to protect them from unnecessary infection.

References