



Role of Dentists in Patient Smoking Cessation Programs

There is increasing interest among members in instituting smoking cessation programs for their patients. In September 1998, the College provided members with an information sheet on the role of dentists in such programs. It is reprinted in this issue of *Dispatch* to help answer some common questions.

Background

Given the incidence of oral cancer in Canada, and the high percentage of these cancers and other oral conditions such as periodontal disease in which tobacco use has been strongly implicated, it is the position of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (RCDSO) that it is in the public interest that dentists who wish to offer smoking cessation programs for their patients do so.

Such participation, in the College's view, would be well within the scope of practice of dentistry and could include the prescription and/or recommended use of nicotine replacement products or other pharmaceutical aids where appropriate.

Recommended Initial Educational Requirements

Before becoming involved with smoking cessation programs for their patients, dentists should have undertaken appropriate training by means of a course or courses which adhere as closely as possible to the following criteria.

The course or courses should:

1. be conducted by persons who have had recognized formal training and significant experience with smoking cessation programs;
2. teach methods and strategies that have been shown to be successful;
3. provide sufficient information and training such that dentists wishing to become involved in the provision of smoking cessation program for their patients:
 - learn about the general and oral effects of smoking;
 - understand the physiological mechanisms of tobacco use;
 - understand addiction and the quitting process;

- review the physiology of the heart and blood vessels;
- learn about the biochemistry of nicotine including the mechanism(s) of action;
- learn effective methods to help patients cease smoking;
- learn advanced counselling strategies and methods;
- learn how to integrate a smoking cessation program in the dental office including patient selection criteria;
- learn about nicotine replacement therapy including:
 - prescribing information
 - contraindications and warnings
 - use during pregnancy and while breastfeeding
 - use with adolescents
 - adverse reactions and effects
 - other cautions
 - other health effects such as increased blood glucose levels
- learn about other pharmacological methods to assist patients with smoking cessation.

Ongoing Education Requirements

Dentists involved in smoking cessation programs for their patients should maintain their knowledge on an ongoing basis through continuing education updates and pharmacology reviews.

Professional Responsibilities

Proper patient evaluation is important for all aspects of dental care, including smoking cessation programs using nicotine replacement therapy or other pharmaceutical approaches.

Current updated medical histories are of utmost importance and patient records should clearly indicate that informed consent was obtained prior to commencing a program.

Patient records should also contain detailed entries about all medications prescribed and/or recommended, as well as a record of any and all advice that was given to the patient. Follow-up notes should record the progress of the smoking cessation initiatives and indicate any changes made to the program.

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