Needlestick safety for the whole dental team

By Rebecca Allen¹

Consider the risk

As part of the dental team, needlesafety is something you should be acutely aware of in your day-to-day role. A survey of 1,216 dental nurses from the UK and Ireland conducted in conjunction with the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN) in 2014 found that 51.2% of respondents had received a needlesafety injury at some point throughout their career, with 60% of those saying they'd received more than one. When you then consider the risk of infection following a needlesafety injury is

¹ Rebecca is Category Manager at Initial Medical (<http://www.initial.co.uk/healthcare-waste/>). She has worked in the healthcare sector for the past 13 years and was a Research Chemist with Bayer Cropscience prior to joining Rentokil Initial in 2003. She keeps up to date on all developments within the clinical waste management industry and is an active member of the CIWM, SMDSA and BDIA.

estimated to be one in three for Hepatitis B virus (HBV), one in 30 for Hepatitis C virus (HCV) and one in 300 for HIV (for healthcare workers worldwide), it is vital that safety procedures are put in place in all dental surgeries.

The use of sharps

Following the introduction of The Health & Safety (Sharps Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013, all healthcare facilities must ensure that:

- The use of medical sharps at work is avoided so far as is reasonably practicable
- When medical sharps are used at work, safer sharps are used so far as is reasonably practicable
- Needles that are medical sharps are not capped after use at work unless:
 - that act is required to control a risk identified by an assessment undertaken pursuant to regulation 3 of the

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (a)

- the risk of injury to employees is effectively controlled by the use of a suitable appliance, tool or other equipment
- (d) In relation to the safe disposal of medical sharps that are not designed for re-use:
- there should be written instructions for employees
 - clearly marked and secure containers should be located close to areas where medical sharps are used at work.

Health and safety law has always placed general responsibilities on the employer to provide their staff with a healthy working environment. However, this legislation now puts further emphasis on prevention. In reality it would be difficult, if not impossible, to remove all sharps from a dental practice, so the next best thing is to assess the risk correctly, use devices

which limit the risk of injury and dispose of all sharps in a safe manner.

Top tips for needlestick safety are shown in Table 1.

Cradle-to-grave rule

It's important to remember that when it comes to hazardous and infectious waste such as syringes and other sharps at a dental practice, the cradle-to-grave rule applies. The producer of waste will always be held responsible for the safe and legal disposal of it, even after it has been passed onto the waste carrier collecting it. This is why it's important to work with comprehensively trained sharps waste disposal experts who will advise on the correct products that comply with both the UK and EU legislation and safely and securely dispose of sharps. Health and safety

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Table 1 Top tips for needlestick safety

Always dispose of used sharps directly into an approved sharps container

It is essential that your sharps are segregated and disposed of correctly based on their medical contamination. The lid colour and label on the container relates to how the waste should be treated and disposed of.

Where possible, place the sharps container at the point of use

This avoids the need to walk anywhere with a needle, which creates higher risk of an injury occurring.

Do not re-sheath needles

When the Health & Safety (Sharps Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013 came into place, the recapping of needles was banned, so it is now against regulations to do so. The purpose of this is to prevent needlestick injuries from occurring when removing the needle. You should use a safer sharps device to remove needles from your syringe.

Do not leave sharps lying around

Although this may seem obvious, sharps injuries are still known to occur as a result of sharps being left lying around, when other people are not aware that they are there, so it is extremely important that they are disposed of immediately after use.

Report all sharps injuries immediately

If a sharps injury does occur, you need to ensure you follow the below steps:

- Encourage bleeding from the wound
- Dry the wound and cover it with a waterproof dressing
- Seek urgent medical advice
- Report the injury and ensure all details are reported in your practice's accident reporting book.

protecting clinical staff and patients when not in use. The needle can then be safely disposed of using a sharps container. Specially developed sharps disposal bins are designed for such waste and comply with all EU and UK regulations and directives, and there are companies available that provide a dependable and safe collection service.

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BDJ Team promotion Initial Medical Waste Experts

Initial Medical is an expert in healthcare waste management, providing a complete collection, disposal and recycling service for hazardous and non-hazardous waste, such as offensive waste produced by businesses and organisations within the UK. The safe management of healthcare waste is vital to ensure your activities are not a risk to human health. Initial Medical's healthcare waste services ensure that all of your waste is stringently handled in compliance with legislation and in accordance with Safe Management of Healthcare Waste best practice guidelines, providing you with the peace of mind that you are adhering to current legislation.

For further information visit www.initialmedical.co.uk or call 0800 731 0802.

law is criminal law and healthcare organisations can be subject to enforcement action if they fail to comply with the legal requirements. There is also always a threat of civil law action if an employee is injured due to insufficient practices and technologies being in place.

Staff wellbeing

Everyone has a role to play in the prevention of sharps injuries, from trainee staff who are learning the ropes, to practice owners who will hold legal overall responsibility for the wellbeing of their staff.

Another quick and simple way to reduce the risk of needlestick injuries is to use innovative solutions such as InSafe syringes – a safety system providing comprehensive protection for clinical staff from the beginning of the procedure through to the disposal of the needle. InSafe's syringe and sharps box ensure that the contaminated needle is never exposed except during the actual injection. It feels and aspirates just like a traditional syringe so there will be no interruptions to the dental practice when introducing the protective system. When the injection has been administered, the protective sleeve locks securely into place over the needle,