Other journals in brief

A selection of abstracts of clinically relevant papers from other journals.

The abstracts on this page have been chosen and edited by John R. Radford.

'AMALGAM SENSITIVITY'

Predictors of treatment outcomes after removal of amalgam fillings: associations between subjective symptoms, psychometric variables and mercury levels

Weidenhammer W, Bornschein S *et al.* *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol* 2010; **37**: 1–10.

Patients who are 'amalgam sensitive' may benefit from either removal of their amalgam restorations or psychosocial support.

Seventy-eight patients (44% female) with a mean age of 35 years old completed questionnaires assessing symptoms, psychological distress and health status before and 12 months after replacement of amalgam restorations. Either amalgam removal or psychological coping strategies were 'similarly successful'. It was also reported that the removal of amalgams was associated with significantly reduced levels of inorganic mercury in plasma as well as mercury levels in urine. Interestingly, those patients whose amalgam restorations were not removed, 'also showed a slight reduction of mercury levels'. This cross-sectional study was not able to determine whether some 'abnormalities' in personality predispose to developing amalgam related complaints or if these are as a consequence of chronic exposure to low level mercury'.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2010.268

FACIAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Eye fixations when viewing faces

Hickman L, Firestone AR *et al.* *J Am Dent Assoc* 2010; **141**: 40–46.

'...even the smiling mouth, received less than 10 percent of the viewers' visual attention.'

It has been held that the mouth is of major importance when assessing facial attractiveness. More recently however, 'background facial attractiveness was more important than were dentofacial features' even if these were unattractive. In this study, 50 young adults viewed static images of faces after orthodontic treatment. Eye movements were measured using the pupillary-corneal reflection technique with an eye-tracking device. The measurements were repeated after 2 weeks. Although intraobserver variability was high, no single facial feature was viewed in preference to another when viewing a 'nonsmile', smile and profile image of the face. Of significance, '...in less than 10 percent of the 3,000 image viewings' was the mouth viewed first, most frequently or longest. The use of static images in this study, may have influenced the findings. Digital videography can capture dynamic facial expressions.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2010.269

HEAD AND NECK CANCER

Components of socioeconomic risk associated with head and neck cancer: a population-based case-control study in Scotland

Conway DI, McMahon AD *et al.* *Br J Oral Maxillofac Surg* 2010; **48**: 11–17.

It appeared that 'Significance was lost for all measures of social class when adjustments were made for smoking and consumption of alcohol'.

In this study, the occupation, education, smoking habits and alcohol consumption were determined by interviewing 103 patients (age range 24–80 years) who had been diagnosed with cancer of the head and neck and 91 controls. Although the investigators concluded that generally 'lower SES (socio-economic status) is associated with an increased risk of head and neck cancer' they were unable to ascribe 'the separate components'. The predominant risk factor for head and neck cancer was smoking, whereas the relationship with alcohol was not clear. The authors cite the 'cause of the cause' argument of Rose; adverse lifestyles such as smoking and consumption of alcohol may be 'coping mechanisms for the stress that is associated with low SES'. The authors concede that 'Poor rates of response for both groups may have made our sample unrepresentative.'

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2010.270

SWINE FLU

Swine-origin H1N1 influenza A virus and dental practice: a critical review

Pitak-Arnrop P, Schubert S *et al.* *Clin Oral Investig* 2010; **14**(1): 11–17.

'Unless it is urgent, dental treatment in 'suspected' or 'confirmed' patients (of swine flu) should be deferred...'

Was it because of rigorous strategic planning and implementation or fortune that the swine flu pandemic has not materialised? Most of this article explores issues such as 'antigenic drift enable(ing) the virus to escape the pre-existing antibodies and the herd immunity' and the long-term safety aspects of H1N1 pandemic vaccines. The authors state that the dental literature is bereft on the subject but cite editorial comments in the *Br Dent J* and *J Am Dent Assoc*. The thrust of their advice is to postpone elective dental treatment for those suspected of the condition. In addition, they suggest that NSAIDs 'should be avoided because they may enhance viral virulence, aggravate symptoms, and subsequent multi-organ failure'.

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