

Accidents and emergencies

Accidents and medical emergencies can happen to anybody at any time and in any place, if either takes place in a dental practice there should be staff that are adequately trained to deal with the problem quickly and correctly.

Medical Emergencies

All members of staff in practice should be trained to deal with, or assist in dealing with, medical emergencies including;

- Heart attacks
- Choking
- Epileptic fits
- Anaphylaxis
- Asthma attacks
- Fainting
- Hypoglycaemia
- Cardiac arrest

Practices should provide annual training for all staff in Basic Life Support (BLS). This training is usually provided by an outside organisation that attends the practice for several hours or a whole day and trains everybody in dealing with possible emergencies. They ensure that each member of the team understands their role in the event of an emergency and what should and shouldn't be done. Those members of the team who have to complete continuing professional development (CPD), must remember that 'medical emergencies' is a core topic which has to be covered; it is a good way for staff to keep up to date with guidelines and recommendations regarding medical emergencies in the dental practice.

Medical emergencies – emergency drugs

Every practice must have an up to date medical emergency kit containing a number of specific emergency drugs, including;

- Aspirin (300mg)
- Glyceryl Trinitrate
- Adrenaline 1,1000
- Salbutamol inhaler
- Midazolam
- Glucagon
- Dextrose Gel 40%
- Oxygen

A clear record of expiry dates of these drugs must be kept and a member of staff should be given the responsibility to maintain and check stock levels on a regular basis. Oxygen tanks must be tested by an approved company regularly, and all records must be kept safely.

Dental care professionals who work in the dental surgery need to understand and know the functions of these drugs (and all other required emergency equipment), although it is primarily the responsibility of the dentist to administer these drugs when required.

Essential items in the emergency kit include:

- Guedel airway (OP air ways)
- Pocket mask
- Ambu bags (child and adult)
- Sterile syringes of various sizes
- Portable suction
- Glucose meter
- Metronome
- Volumamatic spacer
- Oxygen therapy masks (high/low flow)
- As well as various other items

It is vital that everybody knows where the emergency kit and oxygen are kept!

In the near future it is believed that dental practices will have to include defibrillators in their emergency kit. This specific piece of equipment is said to save many lives when an emergency has presented itself in a public place, aeroplanes and shopping centres already have to have defibrillators available to their first aiders, so why not dental practices? Training on the use of this machine will be expected to be covered in a practices annual BLS course.

Medical History

The importance of getting an up to date medical history from patients at the start of each course of treatment or at least every six months cannot be stressed enough. If an emergency does occur it is vital that dental staff are aware of any existing conditions or diseases that a patient may have and be aware of the medication they take, this information must be given to paramedics upon their arrival at the scene.

Medical Emergencies – Top Tips

It is advisable to have an in house training session every so often to try to ensure that if an emergency does occur everybody will be sure of what they need to do, it would be far better to discover that a team member doesn't know where the emergency oxygen is kept during a training session than in a real life emergency situation! This is a good way to be as efficient as possible in the event of any medical emergencies in your practice and could vastly improve the patients' chance of survival.

If an emergency does occur within the dental practice an accurate record of the entire event must be documented for legal reasons. Don't forget any member of the dental team who is registered with the GDC is responsible for their own actions; it is no longer the dentist's responsibility!

Of course the last thing any dental care professional wants is for any medical emergencies to occur in their practice but all of us should understand the importance of knowing what to do if it does happen and ensure our training and knowledge is adequate and up to date.

