

From the Eyes of Dental Hygiene
By: Colleen Rutledge, RDH

On July 16, 2004, I was invited to speak to an assembly of representatives and staff at the home office in Mt. Laurel, NJ. The intention of the presentation was to lend support to representatives, as well as new distributors of the piezoelectric ultrasonic scaler through the experience and knowledge of a seasoned hygienist. Represented by the home office were: Haye Hinrichs, Dave Murphy, Joe Donahue, Wyatt Wilson, and Geraldine Payan. Also in attendance were independent representatives: Bob Lopez, Jim Lee, Leon Rapport, Jeff Barowitz, and Jim Kaplan.

The Systemic Link *“What do the germs in our mouth have to do with the rest of our body?”*

My presentation began by explaining the link between biofilm, a sticky, mushroom-shaped colony of germs that is present in bacterial plaque and the rest of the body. The biofilm, when mature, produces endotoxins that enter the bloodstream through tiny ulcerations at the base of the periodontal pocket. Among the systemic diseases that are closely affected by these endotoxins are: Cardiovascular Disease (CVD), Diabetes, Atherosclerosis (clogging of the arteries), and Osteoporosis. In stroke victims, 40% of the deposits found on the carotid artery walls come from the bacterial plaque that is found in periodontal disease. Women who have chronic periodontal disease are 7 times more likely to deliver pre- term/low birth weight babies. Chances of stomach ulcers reoccurring, in addition to susceptibility to pneumonia, is more likely from the high oral bacterial count in the stomach and lungs, respectively.

Evolution of the Dental Hygienist *“Why is dental hygiene changing?”*

Periodontal medicine, an innovative and budding division of health care, is bridging the gap between dentistry and medicine. The cover of February 23, 2004 TIME magazine titled, “The Silent Killer... The surprising link between Inflammation and Heart Attacks, Cancer, Alzheimer’s and other diseases” has sparked attention of both dental practitioners and patients alike. Clinicians are becoming more research driven, as traditional methods are dissolving into evidence based pathways.

Clinical Procedures “*What do hygienists do anyway?*”

Hygienists perform a number of procedures from supra-gingival (above the gum line) scaling and polishing, sub-gingival (below the gum line) scaling, to more complicated periodontal procedures including quadrant scaling with anesthesia, full mouth disinfection and placement of locally applied antimicrobials. Research has established the use of ultrasonics as being as effective as hand scaling, giving ultrasonic technology a key role in contemporary periodontal therapeutics. Proper use of ultrasonics also aids the conscientious hygienist by preserving the fluoride rich layer of enamel that polishing pastes have been known to remove.

Ultrasonics vs. Hand Scaling “*I am happy with the results I get from hand scaling with my instruments. Why should I use any ultrasonic scaler?*”

There are many reasons hygienists should employ ultrasonics. In addition to (or in place of) hand instruments, the lavage promotes excellent healing benefits and debris removal while decreasing operator fatigue and increasing efficiency. Ultrasonic tongue disinfection removes volatile sulfur compounds (the bacteria responsible for most bad breath) by “sweeping” the tongue with the back of the tip. Acoustics provide the benefit of breaking up the biofilm beyond the reach of the tip as well as providing access to difficult areas. Ultrasonics also aid in tooth preparation for cavity detecting laser technology by removing all debris and biofilm thereby permitting more accurate readings.

Magnetostrictive vs. Piezo “*Why shouldn’t our office purchase another ‘Cavitron’?*”

During most of my two-decade career, I have used magnetostrictive ultrasonics. In comparison, piezoelectric are quieter and require less water. Thinner, probe-like tips provide easy access with less tissue trauma. The light weight hand piece and ergonomic cord reduces the chance for operator injury, prolonging the longevity of a hygienist’s career.

Tactile sensitivity is enhanced, allowing better deposit removal. Patient comfort, due to the linear tip movement, greatly reduces (if not eliminates) need for anesthesia in periodontal therapy cases.

Piezoelectric ultrasonic technology offers low power settings which enable clinicians to use the thinnest tips; with uses ranging from routine preventative care to severe periodontal cases. Although thinner inserts for magnetostrictive units are now available, there is no comparison to the selection and design that Satelec offers.

Another feature piezoelectric ultrasonics boast is the decreased amount of water compared to magnetostrictive, as well as less generated heat, which is appreciated by both patients and practitioners alike.

Increased practice revenue is also realized by creating potential for incorporation of the periodontal therapist model, which permits qualified hygienists to practice at an advanced and productive level. Daily production transforms from “loss leaders” at \$600- \$800 to “production leaders”, surpassing \$2500 in an average eight hour day.

A final, but important feature that Satelec’s P5 offers is easy portability, complimenting its light weight and compact design. This is a great feature for practices where space is an issue or the unit will be shared between operatories. It is also ideal for hygienists that are employed as subcontractors or temps, traveling to multiple practices.

Team Up analgesic unit “*What!? My patient may not need anesthesia!?*”

The *Team Up* analgesic unit provides a welcome enhancement in states where hygienists can not administer local anesthesia. There are still 13 states left in the United States that do not permit hygienists to anesthetize patients. This is a real ‘stress reducer’ for the dentist, as they do not have to be interrupted to numb patients on the hygiene schedule. Hygienists benefit also because they are in better control of their schedule. However, the greatest satisfaction is the look on the patient’s face when you tell them they don’t need anesthesia!!

Suggestions for Increased Sales

Think “outside the box” and try some of the below ideas to help grow your business:

- 1.) Arrange lunch meetings for one-on-one time with RDH’s

- 2.) Do not underestimate the purchasing power of a RDH!
- 3.) Read current and popular dental hygiene journals
- 4.) Visit hygiene/dental websites
- 5.) Join an on-line hygiene and/or dental community
- 6.) Set up table exhibits at conferences and CE courses
- 7.) Network with the dental community
- 8.) Get intimate with the material in this article
- 9.) Offer CE courses - No company manufacturing piezoelectric ultrasonics is currently offering this!

In conclusion, seeing things from the eyes of a working hygienist will allow you to educate and motivate your clients and increase sales. Remember, you have got the world's best piezoelectric ultrasonic to offer to your customers! Embrace the information in this article. Add it to your tools in your tool box. Keep a positive attitude and a smile on your face! Be patient...the rest of the dental world will eventually catch on!

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