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Managing acute pain

Dr Michael Sultan, clinical director of

EndoCare

Acute pain is the awareness of noxious signals from damaged tissue and is complicated, not only by sensitisation in the periphery, but also by changes in the central nervous system. It is often influenced and exacerbated by a person's emotional state and can be debilitating for sufferers. However, the fact that it can and does make life miserable for thousands of people every single day is often overlooked.



I feel very strongly that it is our job as caring professionals to remain at the forefront of acute pain management in order to best help our patients, and a big part of that lies in education.

In a fact sheet created for this year's 'Global Year Against Acute Pain', the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) indicates that inadequate education on acute pain treatment for healthcare individuals has led to the misunderstanding of the seriousness of, and treatment options for, acute pain.¹ Because of this, there is a far-reaching underassessment and under treatment of acute pain, despite the prevalence of sophisticated medical and non-medical treatment options.

Our mission statement as dental professionals in general, and as endodontists in particular, should be that it is the right of every patient to be free of pain and that, as endodontists, we will ensure that we will do all that we can to provide real health and emotional benefits for all who suffer.

If we ourselves are aware of the issues surrounding the assessment and treatment of acute pain, we can help to educate our colleagues in the use of anaesthetics and analgesics, thus enabling them to offer better solutions for their patients. Patients, in turn, need to be given as much information as possible, as many are reluctant to take painkillers because they fear possible addiction or unpleasant side-effects.

It is imperative, for the sake of best practice, and the welfare of our patients, that we ensure the optimum treatment for all by educating patients and working with the Government to ensure private access for NHS patients.

The Steele report² recently suggested less wealthy patients are forced to settle for extractions and dentures rather than tooth preservation, and that root canal treatments are the preserve of the rich. I feel that it is our job to work together to raise awareness and bolster education on the vital topic of acute pain.

References

1 *Global Year Against Pain Fact sheet Why the Gaps between Evidence and Practice?* <http://www.iasp-pain.org/Content/NavigationMenu/GlobalYearAgainstPain/GlobalYearAgainstAcutePain/FactSheets/default.htm> (accessed 03/02/2011).

2 http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Primarycare/Dental/DH_094418 page 57ff (accessed 03 02 2011)

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