

ASPIRATION RISK MANAGEMENT

Responding to foreign body aspiration



BACKGROUND

During dental procedures, when the patient is in a reclined position and small restorative materials and dental components are introduced into the oral cavity, it's possible for the patient to accidentally aspirate or ingest a foreign body. What the dentist and dental team do after that is important in avoiding legal entanglements.

RECOMMENDED RESPONSES OF THE DENTAL TEAM

If a patient ingests or swallows something during a dental procedure, proper follow-up is to take a proactive stance. It's not advisable to adopt a "wait-and-see" approach.

The dentist should stop treatment immediately and assess the situation, even if it doesn't appear to be a significant problem. This is essential.

The patient should be stabilized, then the dentist should calmly explain what happened. It's important to check the immediate area to see if the object can be located. If it's not found, the patient should be referred to his or her physician for follow-up and referral for x-rays.

The dentist should ensure that the incident is properly documented. Any witnesses and their contact information should also be listed.

It's vital to follow up with the patient to check on his or her recovery. In addition, the practice insurance carrier should be contacted and an incident report filed.

DISCUSSION

Both communication and compassion are essential components of a proper response to possible patient injury. Showing compassion does not constitute an admission of guilt. If the dentist doesn't recognize the patient's distress and follow up appropriately, the patient may become more upset and seek legal recourse. Simply expressing concern and acknowledging the situation can avoid these feelings.

Patients may expect the dentist to cover the copay or other minor expenses as a gesture of good will. Before offering any payments or reimbursements, the dentist should check with the Risk Management Advice Line. Dentists can also speak with an analyst about any other patient demands, but may also need to contact a claims representative if more than a small monetary payment is expected.

Clinical Significance

Routine clinical procedures can be complicated by having a patient aspirate or swallow a restoration or other dental material. Dentists need to know how to respond in these situations so they can experience the best possible outcome for both themselves and their patients.

TDIC Risk Management Staff: Posttreatment care crucial in foreign object aspiration incidents. *Calif Dent Assoc J* 46:779-780, 2018

Reprints not available

DENTAL FRAUD

Embezzlement



THE LAKE HOUSE

The lake house was beautiful and located on one of the most amazing lots dentist Bill had ever seen. It was good to run into his friend Paul and have the chance to catch up while relaxing in this beautiful spot. When a couple arrived, Paul motioned for Bill to come over for an introduction, but then Bill realized

that the woman was Frances, his front desk employee, and the man was her husband. She turned abruptly and headed into the house, soon followed by her husband, who appeared to have received a call. Bill thought it was strange and asked Paul about the couple, who he said were neighbors. They had owned their place longer than he had his. His realtor had handled their sale,