

## **Dental Nurses role in Infection Control**

With the responsibility for the implementation of infection control policies falling largely on the shoulders of dental nurses, it is vital that they are fully aware of the appropriate local guidelines, understand how to comply and know where to access help and advice if required. In all these areas and more, DeconPete and many other companies are available to help.

Below is a brief guide to some of the key areas to consider in decontamination.

### **Hard Surface Cleaning**

Ensuring surfaces in surgical areas are sufficiently cleaned and disinfected between every patient, not only reduces the potential spread of viruses and controls bacteria, it is also the cornerstone of good infection control. Whether you choose to clean and disinfect as separate tasks, or prefer to choose a combined cleaner and disinfectant in one product, is down to personal choice. However, we saw in the 2013 edition of HTM 01-05, applicable in England, paragraph 6.57 was reworded to confirm that alcohol-based wipes are not suitable for single-stage cleaning and disinfection in an environment where protein-based soils are likely to be present. Alcohol can be used provided the surface is cleaned first.

### **Washer Disinfectors**

Thorough cleaning of instruments is an essential pre-requisite to sterilisation as, by definition, only clean instruments can be sterile. In Scotland and Ireland, practices are required to use washer disinfectors; in England and Wales, their use is required as part of the move to 'best practice'. HTM 01-05 Section 3.9 states 'Whenever possible, cleaning should be undertaken using an automated and validated process in preference to manual cleaning.' Washer disinfectors are also the other truly validatable cleaning process with consistent results every time. It is extremely important, however, that to achieve this consistency the washer must be loaded in the correct manner and never overloaded.

### **Steam Sterilisers**

There are three main types of steam sterilisers as outlined by EN 13060:

- Type N: non-vacuum sterilisers designed for non-wrapped solid instruments such as scalers, probes, mirrors etc.
- Type B (vacuum): incorporate a vacuum stage and designed to reprocess load types such as hollow, air-retentive and packaged loads, including solid instruments.
- Type S: specially designed to reprocess specific load types as defined by the manufacturer. These can include solid, hollow and air retentive loads.

We must ensure that the autoclave is loaded correctly and that the correct instruments for the cycle type are processed. For example, we only place solid instruments into a Non-vac and not handpieces, forceps etc. or anything that is air retentive.

### **Test and Validation**

The need to test and validate equipment to ensure it is performing within manufacturer's parameters is an important part of compliance and daily, weekly, quarterly and annual tests must be performed and the results documented. Always follow your equipment user manual for full instructions.

## **Training and Education**

As key aspects of patient safety and service quality, decontamination training and education must be part of ongoing staff development.

Knowledge in the area of infection control is constantly advancing, technology is evolving and research is uncovering more relevant data on how to minimise the risks from cross infection. Keeping up with the changes is a constant challenge, which is why it's important to know where to access information and ensure your practice meets its compliance obligations.

If you need any help with compliance, knowledge and information you can either email me at [info@deconpete.co.uk](mailto:info@deconpete.co.uk) or visit the website, [www.deconpete.co.uk](http://www.deconpete.co.uk), where you will find lots of useful content including some newly added online vCPD courses.