

Caries

PRACTITIONER INFORMATION SUMMARY No. 2

Our current concepts of dental decay and knowledge of prevention impact significantly on a patient management plan. Provision of the best care to patients depends on the provider's ability to effectively implement current knowledge at all stages of patient management.

Risk assessment affects patient's management plan

A thorough examination and risk assessment at the beginning of a course of care is essential for every patient as they will facilitate formulation of an appropriate treatment plan. Assessment of low, moderate or high caries risk require markedly different management plans to achieve success. The patients' involvement and ability to achieve control of the caries process is critical to successful management.

Successful control of caries requires detailed planning, including assessment of the causes of the caries problem. In high risk cases low fluoride exposure, salivary protection and erosive factors in the diet must be investigated.

Stabilisation of the oral environment

Where active caries is detected during the initial examination, effective management often requires

initial stabilisation of the oral environment before permanent restorations are placed. This is done to improve the potential of pulp to recover and to reduce the risk of recurrent caries.

Short versus long term success in controlling caries

Short term success in controlling caries is often readily achievable. It is the long term maintenance of success that requires continuous efforts of members of the dental team. They need to be able to assess progressive success in controlling caries, to help the patient through the difficult task of changing and maintaining home care procedures, and to apply fluoride or sealants as required.

Successful dental practice needs now to be measured primarily by a clinician's ability to prevent patients from developing new caries lesions and not by the amount of carious lesions restored. With patients that continually return with new or recurrent caries, the reason is possibly the lack of proper diagnosis or implementation of a management plan to help the patient control caries.