

The reality of nonscience-based newsletters

Responsibility weighs heavily on all who publish in the scientific literature. Treatment choices for patients are commonly made by clinicians on the basis of two sources of written information in addition to courses and videotapes. One is the objective peer-reviewed journal article, and the other is made up of subjective reports from a variety of sources such as free magazines or subscription newsletters. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ethically and honestly report research in an objective manner in peer-reviewed journals, and it is the responsibility of reviewers and editors to honestly and objectively review and publish the reports. It is the responsibility of the evaluator and newsletter publisher to carefully weigh subjective comments by which dentists may determine treatment choices for patients and to have an appreciation for how the information they are publishing is likely to be understood by the readers.

Understand this, if you can. A colleague who has responsibility for publishing a newsletter uses a new resin-modified glass-ionomer cement *contrary* to the manufacturer's instructions to bond a ceramic crown. Based on a minor surface crack in *one* restoration (one of 20 he placed in this patient) seen 11 months after placement, he then publicly advises against *all* uses of the cement for *any* purposes in a newsletter he sells to practitioners. Imagine actually *paying* for that kind of advice! Not only is the advice worthless, it is misleading and harmful to practitioners and their patients, who may be denied use of an excellent material.

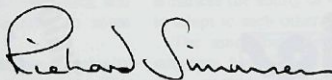
The manufacturer of the material in question specifically contraindicates this luting cement for use with all porcelain crowns, stating in the instructions: "[Material X] is not indicated for composite or porcelain inlays or onlays, composite or all porcelain crowns." Our colleague gets a hairline crack in one porcelain crown and as a result he recommends: "... we (I guess the regal 'we' sounds more authoritative than the more correct first person singular) can no longer recommend their [resin-ionomer luting cements] use for any purposes until these undesirable characteristics are discovered and eliminated."

Why the editor assumes that the cement is to blame is hard to understand. I guess it feels better than

accepting blame for an inadequate preparation of the tooth—probably the most frequent cause of porcelain crown failure. And it feels better than blaming other potential causes of failure—failure of the ceramic itself or improper occlusal adjustment for a start—because most of the other problems are related to operator handling and skill, and that would again mean blaming oneself or the laboratory technician. Whatever the cause of this one failure, it is impossible to trace the key variable responsible for failure and assess causality in one subjectively judged example. To recommend ceasing use of all materials in the resin-modified glass-ionomer luting agent family simply on the basis of having a problem with one crown that the operator placed contrary to the manufacturer's instructions is utter folly.

The newsletter is sent to readers whose work affects the health and welfare of their patients. If this material has beneficial qualities for patients and dentists alike, then a great disservice is being done to anyone who is lulled into following the subjective advice of the writer. It is irresponsible to make broad, sweeping indictments of whole categories of materials on subjective anecdotal evidence. The damage done by this newsletter is fortunately tempered by the number of readers—few, I would guess. And tempered further, I would hope, by the number of readers who actually would change their clinical practice based on anecdotal opinion. While all information is useful, providing the context in which it is gathered is known and understood by the reader, writers abrogate their responsibility to the profession by recommending patient treatment decisions based on anecdote.

The reality is that not all that is written and paid for is worthy of our attention, as at least one person who reads this editorial will no doubt wholeheartedly concur.



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