

## **Tooth Whitening**

### **Statement from the Lay Advisory Group of the FGDP(UK)**

The statements below outline the concerns of the Lay Advisory Group of the Faculty of General Dental Practice (UK) in relation to the provision of tooth whitening to dental patients.

#### **Background**

1. Research suggests that, when used appropriately, tooth whitening is a safe and effective method of improving the aesthetic appearance of teeth in a way that is reported to be minimally invasive<sup>1,2</sup>.
2. Other procedures to provide aesthetic improvements, such as the fitting of crowns and veneers, can involve the permanent destruction of healthy dental tissue. Therefore, the less destructive option of tooth whitening is often worth considering.
3. The UK legal limit of hydrogen peroxide (the whitening agent) in tooth whitening products available over-the-counter for use at home is 0.1%. However, data suggest that an effective whitening outcome can only be achieved with products that contain or release hydrogen peroxide at 3.6% or more<sup>1</sup>.
4. Since home tooth whitening kits sold over-the-counter can only legally contain up to 0.1% hydrogen peroxide, the patient may not see a noticeable whitening effect when using these products. There is also evidence that some kits may cause ulcers and damage to the gums if the product is not used properly<sup>2</sup>.
5. The use of tooth whitening products containing more than 0.1% hydrogen peroxide is widespread by both dental and non-dental professionals.
6. It is the view of the General Dental Council (GDC) that applying materials and carrying out procedures designed to improve the aesthetic appearance of teeth, including tooth whitening, amounts to the practice of dentistry. So too does the giving of clinical advice about such procedures. The carrying out of dentistry by individuals not registered with the GDC is a criminal offence.

7. The GDC is currently prosecuting non-dental professionals who have carried out tooth whitening procedures.

## **Position**

The LAG believes that:

A. The LAG hopes that ongoing discussions concerning the legal position on the use of effective tooth whitening products by all the bodies concerned, including the GDC, Department of Health, Trading Standards Institute and the European Union's Scientific Committee on Consumer Products, will provide clarification for patients and dental professionals.

B. Patients who wish to have their teeth whitened should always consult a dental professional registered with the GDC, rather than seek treatment from a non-dental professional, or self-administer the treatment using over-the-counter kits for use at home.

C. Only by visiting a dental professional can patients ensure that they receive the necessary assessment of their oral health and suitability for tooth whitening treatment. Not all patients are suitable for this treatment.

D. A dental professional, in this case, is a dentist who is appropriately trained and competent to assess the patient and to carry out the treatment safely. A dental hygienist or therapist may also carry out the treatment, although only following prior assessment by and on prescription from a dentist. Dental nurses are permitted by the GDC to take impressions and make bleaching trays, to a dentist's prescription, prior to treatment.

E. Alternative procedures to tooth whitening to improve the aesthetic appearance of otherwise healthy teeth, such as veneers, crowns and other options, can involve the permanent destruction of tissue and may not represent the best treatment option. However, individual patients will differ in what represents an appropriate treatment option for them, and patients should always discuss their individual case with a dentist before considering any treatment.

F. Patients should seek to ensure that their dental professional has the appropriate training to carry out tooth whitening treatments and will act in their best interests. We encourage patients to check the qualifications of their dental professional and membership of a professional body such as the FGDP(UK), to help ensure they receive treatment of the highest standard.

### **References**

1. Scientific Committee On Consumer Products. Guidance document on Epidemiological and clinical studies on Tooth Whitening Products. March 2006
2. Hasson H, Ismail AI, Neiva G. Home-based chemically-induced whitening of teeth in adults (Review). The Cochrane Collaboration. John Wiley & Sons Ltd; 2007.

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