

White elephant – or practice builder?

Richard Horner talks to **Dr André Hedger** about anaesthesia and putting some magic into the practice



Richard Horner: How did you first hear about the Wand?

Dr Hedger: Several years ago, I read about this system in the dental press after its launch in the USA.

I was impressed by the concept and the 40 or so papers behind it but I confess I was a little put off by the fact that the Wand handpiece was connected to the pump unit by a lead – by contrast to my more familiar stand alone syringe and needle, it looked complicated.

RH: So what convinced you to investigate it further?

Dr H: It was being marketed in the UK by Dental Practice Systems (DPS) and I knew from previous experience that this company had a track record of never having a 'white elephant' in its product portfolio.

As dentists, most of us have a 'white elephant' drawer where products that seemed like a good idea at the time can sometimes end up unused. That is not the case with some of the truly innovative products that are presented by DPS. So I asked for a Wand on a week's trial.

RH: How did that trial week go?

Dr H: Well, I didn't give it back! In fact I purchased it and subsequently purchased two more Wands for my associate and my hygienist.

RH: One of the benefits of the Wand is that it delivers local anaesthetic without pain to the patient. Were you conscious of the fact that despite your skill and care, many of your patients experienced some pain and discomfort during local anaesthesia with a traditional syringe?

Dr H: That's a difficult question. Like most of my professional colleagues, I have pride in the clinical skills I have developed and have always put patient comfort first. I would maintain that I always injected as painlessly as possible.

But if I am honest, and all dentists will recognise this, you are always aware of the effect of your actions when the patient flinches, grimaces or winces in discomfort. So yes, I think the majority of local anaesthetic given by dentists is uncomfortable, even if they have used a topical anaesthetic and delivered the local as slowly as possible.

RH: Dentists, and other healthcare professionals, have been using the traditional syringe that has not changed in design since it was introduced 150 years ago. Is it the design that's at fault and not so much the dentists' technique?

Dr H: That's probably correct.

The normal metal syringe, fully loaded, is about 9" long and looks quite barbaric. The issues for the dentist are that it's heavy – so keeping it steady can be difficult – you have no real control over the hydraulic pressure of the delivery of the liquid and the ultra-fine needles used today just increase that pressure. Several studies have shown that the anaesthetic can be delivered up to 2cm past the target because the hydraulic pressure has ripped it through the tissue. That's why it sometimes takes so long to numb, as the anaesthetic is nowhere near to the target.



A touch of magic

The Wand is an advanced technology local anaesthesia system by which anaesthetic is delivered through an ultra lightweight 'pen-like' handpiece in a controlled application. The principal benefits are pain-free injections for the patient and faster onset of numbness for the clinician.

RH: Can you contrast that with the Wand?

Dr H: Firstly, the patient's fear is dramatically reduced because the Wand is like a thin, transparent pencil. It looks modern and is totally non-threatening.

You can hold it like a pen, which allows the dentist to hold it very, very steady. You are only holding this ultra-lightweight device... you are not supporting weight and you are not squeezing.

Perhaps the main difference is that the Wand delivers anaesthetic in a slow controlled manner; it literally just drips out of the end of the needle and numbs as it goes. And you cannot increase that low hydraulic pressure. You also use less volume of anaesthetic to achieve the same result.

RH: So is the onset of numbness faster with the Wand?

Dr H: Yes. Although the amount of time taken to finish the injection is slightly longer than with the conventional technique, the patient is always numb and ready for treatment. So you can start work immediately.

RH: Does using the Wand demand a learning curve?

Dr H: It is pretty simple and intuitive – the instructional DVD and materials are very good.

But I would say it takes four or five days to be fully conversant with the slight changes in technique. When I purchased our second and third wand units for my associate and hygienist, I gave them

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one week for familiarisation before I removed all syringes from the practice. So there's no sneaking back to 'the bad old days'!

RH: How have your patients reacted to the Wand?

Dr H: I explain that we have a new system and that it is called the 'magic' Wand...because to dentists and patients, it is magic.

I tell them it numbs in a completely different way and I just get on with the procedure. I found that for the first time patients were not flinching, their eyes weren't flickering and their knuckles weren't white.

Typical comments were things like 'I didn't feel a needle', 'did you give me a needle', or: 'How come you've numbed me and I haven't had an injection?' Then they went home and told all their friends and family that they've been to a dental practice where they numb you without an injection.

RH: So is the Wand a practice-building tool?

Dr H: It is a magic practice builder. I just think it is reverting to the dark ages to continue with the conventional syringe when this technology is available to help you move forward.

The Wand has had a tremendously positive effect on our practice... just ask all our grateful patients.

For more information on the Wand, please contact Dental Practice Systems on 01438 820550 or visit www.d-p-s.uk.com.

Richard Horner

Runs Scope Dental Professional Relations.

Dr Andre Hedger

Opened his practice in Great Bookham in 1981. He is a Fellow of the Hypno-therapy Society and a founder member of the British Society for the Study of Craniomandibular Disorders. André is also a member of the British Orthodontic Society (BOS) and the International Association for Orthodontics (IAO). He is a member of the British Society for Clinical and Applied Hypnosis (BSCAH), The American Academy of Craniofacial Pain (AACP), The International Academy of Medicine and Toxicology (IOAMT) and Patients Against Mercury Amalgams (PAMA). He is a member of the British Society for Dental Sleep Medicine (BSDSM) as well as several other specialist groups.