Technical Section

TECHNICAL NOTES AND TIPS

Twist-over: stainless steel suture technique for skin graft applications

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A novel latex-free alternative to a proprietary paper framed dental rubber dam

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Proflavine wool with silk 'tie-overs' is used commonly to secure a skin graft. Our new strategy employs a surgical steel wire suture that can be twisted down to secure the graft without the need for multiple ties. Figure 1A shows the graft over the defect, and Figures 1B and 1C show the steel sutures used as simple loops at the graft edges. Six loops are adequate; they are collected in the centre and twisted (Fig 1D). This offers a much quicker tie-over dressing with evenly distributed downward pressure. Each packet of stainless steel suture includes one curved and two straight needles (Fig 1E). Stainless steel sutures are known to be safe and are used in a number of other contexts. Figure 1F shows the patient at 5 days following surgery.

Figure 1 Use of steel twist-over suture technique in sequence from implementation to end result

BACKGROUND

Current guidance recommends reducing patient and healthcare worker exposure to products containing latex as much as possible¹ yet suitable alternatives to established latex-containing materials are not always readily available. Dentists have used rubber dams (RDs) to isolate teeth from the oral environment for nearly 150 years.² Benefits include moisture control, reduced microbial aerosol and airway protection. A square (150mm x 150mm) of latex rubber is used or proprietary variations thereof. DryDam (Directa, Upplands Väsby, Sweden) is one such variation, used primarily to isolate the anterior dentition. It is held in place by elastic loops stretched behind the patient's ears, frequently avoiding the need for the discomfort of RD clamps or local analgesia. Unable to source a latex-free equivalent, we present a simple chairside adaptation of a non-latex RD (Roeko Flexi Dam®, Coltène, Altstätten, Switzerland).

TECHNIQUE

Take a single sheet of non-latex RD. Use the largest diameter on an Ainsworth rubber dam punch (Marrickville, NSW, Australia) to place a hole in each corner of the RD, approximately 20mm from the upper and lower edges and 10mm from the sides. Using a scalpel or scissors, cut from top to bottom between the punched holes to create ear loops (Fig 1). Apply to the teeth as normal (Fig 2). Preparation and application is straightforward and the modified RD is tolerated well by patients.

Figure 1 Proprietary paper framed rubber dam (left) and our latex-free adaptation (right)