Iatrogenic errors before and after non-surgical root-canal treatment

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Fig. 1_Diagnostic radiograph, showing the separated instrument in the mesiobuccal canal.
Fig. 2_Size 15 Flexile file passing through the perforation.


Fig. 1


Fig. 2

_Several reports in the literature describe iatrogenic errors during root-canal treatment. The most common errors include perforations, ledging, transportation, zipping, overextension, file separation and underfilling. Little emphasis is placed on the preparation of a tooth before starting root-canal treatment, or on the finishing of the tooth after obturation of the root-canal system. On various online forums and in several clinical articles, beautifully executed root-canal treatments are shown with coronal restorations that are less than ideal. This is a serious problem, since it has been demonstrated that a successful outcome depends not only on adequate root-canal treatment, but also on adequate coronal restoration. In this article, I will elaborate on these aspects and present a case as an example.

_Before starting root-canal treatment

As endodontists, we are specialised in the treatment of root-canal systems. However sometimes we focus on this only, forgetting that there is more to a tooth than a root. When a patient comes into our office, often he will have (a) symptomatic apical periodontitis. Whether the tooth has been treated before is somewhat irrelevant in the scope of this article. The first thing that we, as practitioners, should try to determine is the cause of the problem. The most cited causes are previous inadequate root-canal treatment, primary decay, recurring decay, worn restorations and poor restorations overall. If the tooth has not undergone root-canal treatment previously, then the cause of the problem is most likely one of the

coronal factors. It is important to address this. After all, what is the point of performing a beautiful root-canal treatment if the primary cause of the problem is not treated?

The best way to do this is by removing the old restoration completely, followed by full caries removal. This may sound logical, but it is not. There are certain disadvantages with this approach, and it is these disadvantages that guide many practitioners in their decision-making. Removing an existing restoration might result in the sacrifice of healthy tissue and it might make it more difficult to obtain proper isolation with a rubber dam. Another factor is time; removing an old restoration is time-consuming and even more so if a build-up is required before endodontic treatment. These are some reasons that many practitioners choose to leave the old restoration in place. This can compromise the treatment outcome and is a risk that can be avoided.

Fortunately, there are advantages too. By removing the old restoration and subsequently all the caries, the practitioner eliminates one of the major causes of failure and can assess immediately whether the tooth is restorable and thus avoid unnecessary treatment. Another advantage is that it is necessary to fabricate a completely new restoration afterwards, which avoids patching up of old restorations. Overall, the advantages are greater than the disadvantages and the only thing it requires from the practitioner is a change in behaviour and some perseverance.

_After root-canal treatment

Once root-canal treatment has been completed, often we need to send the patient back to the referring dentist. In this case, an adequate temporary restoration must be placed. Typically, a temporary filling material like Cavit (3M ESPE) or a glass ionomer cement is used. A cotton pellet or some other form of space maintainer is generally placed underneath this temporary filling. This is done because the referring dentist then has easier access to the pulp chamber so that he can gain better retention when placing the permanent restoration. There are several disadvantages to this approach. Leaving space between the temporary restoration and the canal orifices puts the patient at risk of contamination. As practitioners we cannot guarantee that the patient will show up for the permanent restoration, sometimes the appointment is cancelled for a variety of reasons. Another risk is fracture of the restoration and/or tooth. If that happens the gutta-percha can be exposed to saliva, which too might lead to contamination. Ideally, however, the tooth should be restored immediately after the root-canal treatment has been carried out. This means that the endodontist places the permanent restoration.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Advantages with this approach are:

_It saves the patient a visit to his regular dentist.
_The tooth is already isolated, creating the ideal environment for a restoration.
_It saves the referring dentist time, which he can spend on other treatments.
_It offers the endodontist some variety in the treatments he performs, enabling him to broaden his skill set.

Again, this only requires a change in behaviour of the practitioner and some perseverance. It will also require that the referring dentist allow the endodontist to place the restoration. The endodontist will have to upgrade his skills, so that he can also create beautiful coronal restorations.

Following, is a case that illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of the above-mentioned approaches.

Fig. 3_Perforation repair with grey MTA-Angelus.
Fig. 4_Post-op radiograph.
Fig. 5_Follow-up radiograph after nine months, showing coronal restoration that was less than ideal.


Fig. 6

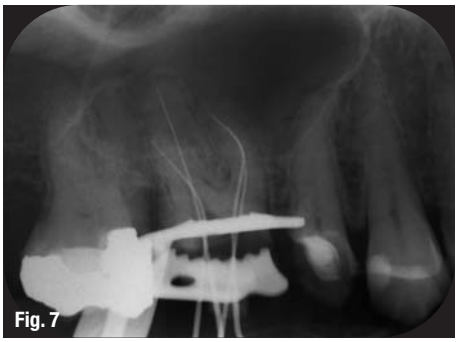
Fig. 7


Fig. 8

Fig. 6_Diagnostic radiograph of another referred tooth (tooth #16).
Fig. 7_Working length, together with complete removal of the old restoration.
Fig. 8_Post-op radiograph, with temporary glass ionomer restoration.

_Case report

When I had just graduated as an endodontist, a 36-year-old male patient was referred because he was experiencing some mild pain in his left mandibular second molar. I was acting as a third-line practitioner in this case. Another endodontist did not wish to begin treatment and finally referred the patient to me.

The tooth was diagnosed as having symptomatic apical periodontitis and was previously treated inadequately, including a separated instrument in one of the mesial canals (Fig. 1).

In the first visit, I removed the gutta-percha from the mesiolingual canal, and cleaned and shaped it completely. The separated instrument was located in the mesiobuccal canal, but I could not remove it completely. I left the distal canal untouched. Calcium hydroxide was used as an inter-appointment dressing, and the tooth was restored with a cotton pellet and glass ionomer cement. An initial error was made by not removing the old restoration and caries completely.

One month later the patient returned in agony. When I re-opened the tooth, a great deal of pus and blood came out of the tooth. I then tried to bypass the remainder of the fragment in the mesiobuccal canal, but perforated the root with a 15.04 ProFile (DENTSPLY Maillefer; Fig. 2). I also retreated the distal canal in this session and fractured a small piece of a 25.06 ProFile in the apical part, but could bypass it. I then filled the canals again with calcium hydroxide and sealed the tooth with a glass ionomer filling.

One month later, I saw the patient again for the completion of the treatment. He no longer had any symptoms. I restored the perforation with grey MTA-Angelus (Fig. 3). I obturated the canals with gutta-percha and Topseal (DENTSPLY Maillefer) using warm vertical condensation. I sealed the cavity with Fuji IX A1 (GC) immediately on top of the gutta-percha (Fig. 4). I then referred the patient back to the dentist for a permanent restoration, with the explicit advice to have the distal restoration replaced too.

Nine months later the patient returned to my office for another tooth. I decided to take a follow-up radiograph of the left mandibular second molar to see if healing was favourable. The patient had not experienced any complaints since I completed the treatment and the radiograph showed a favourable apical outcome. However, the permanent restoration was less than ideal (Fig. 5). I had to refer the patient back to the dentist for a new restoration.

_Conclusion

Looking back upon this case, I can conclude that I should have removed the old restoration and the caries at the start of the treatment. Positively, it was good that the glass ionomer filling was placed immediately above the canal orifices, preventing contamination via a leaky restoration. Ideally, I should have finished the restoration myself.

It required a change in my behaviour and some perseverance to begin to perform cases in accordance with the afore-mentioned approaches, as can be seen in Figures 6, 7 and 8._

_about the author roots

Dr Rafaël Michiels graduated from the Department of Dentistry at Ghent University, Belgium, in 2006. In 2009, he completed the three-year postgraduate programme in endodontics at Ghent University. He works in two private practices specialised in endodontics in Belgium. He can be contacted at rafael.michiels@ontzenuwen.be and via his website www.ontzenuwen.be

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