

How can I get involved in implant dentistry safely?

In the first of a new regular series on implants and restorative dentistry, Harry Shiers kicks off with some sound and ethical advice for those considering starting up in implant dentistry

As a general dental practitioner there are very limited choices available to you when it comes to acquiring formal training in implant dentistry. There are two teaching hospitals offering recognised Master of Science level training. These are taught by staff with high level post-graduate qualifications and take place at King's and The Eastman Dental Institute. These institutions run a two-year part time MSc and a one-year full time MSc programme respectively.

There is an array of implant courses on offer and advertised in various journals, but it is prudent to examine the training and expertise of those running the courses and how much you will learn.

Can you be taught the surgical side of implant dentistry in a day, a week, or a month? Would you practise on your child or family after attending such a short course?

Even if you feel you are unable to commit to the formal training offered at the aforementioned teaching hospitals, you can be involved in implant dentistry responsibly in the following ways:

1. Be able to recognise a suitable implant case, such as a single tooth, a partial denture, an implant-retained complete denture

or a bridge

2. Know who you can refer your patients to reliably and safely because of their expert training and results

3. Learn how to restore simple cases by getting training and building your expertise safely and surely

4. Decide at which level you wish to be involved, you can:

i. Refer the entire case

ii. Refer the surgical part of the case and manage the restorative part

iii. Commit to formal proper training and be completely involved in the knowledge that you have acquired.

Learning how to identify suitable implant cases takes a little time, however, there are a number of speakers who lecture on the circuit and attending such evenings can provide insight into identifying suitable cases.

The restorative side of implant dentistry is taught at various levels, and there is much to learn that will equip the general dental practitioner with the knowledge required to restore a simple case, such as a single tooth.

If implants are positioned well, it is usually comfortably within the capabilities of the general dental practitioner to

restore these cases once they have acquired knowledge of the components and the various systems they wish to use.

If you are a general dental practitioner who has chosen to refer out the surgical side of implant dentistry, then starting the restorative aspects of treatment can be confusing. The best way of getting started is to adopt the least complicated and most accurate techniques, then develop your skills from this point onwards. ■

Harry RBP Shiers BDS, MSc (implant dentistry), MGDS, MFDS, took his initial training in implants in 1989 with the Institut Straumann. He spent a year teaching undergraduates at The London Dental Hospital. Since then he has spent a year at the Eastman Dental Institute studying implants, prior to completing the two-year part time Master of Science in implant dentistry at Guy's Hospital, London. He currently runs the Implant Referral Centre in London's West End, where he places implants for referring general dental practitioners.