

RISK MANAGEMENT ARTICLE

Rubber Dam It!?!

Although risk management courses have tried to emphasize the use of the rubber dam, it is still not being used as frequently as it should. Regardless of any concern or burden, the use of the rubber dam protects patient from risk and protects the dentist from liability. In the litigious society in which you practice it is all about minimizing risk: to the patient and to you as a practitioner. As such, use of a rubber dam when performing an endodontic procedure is one of those bright line standards in dentistry that can protect both of you.



A summary of dental malpractice cases show that endodontic procedures still rank high among those malpractice cases especially in terms of numbers. Endodontic cases, especially root canals, are common dental procedures. The risk of a patient swallowing an instrument during such a procedure is simply too great to outweigh any inconvenience or burden in using a rubber dam.

Many of the hazards in the use of rubber dams are due to improper application and use. So as with any method, a dentist must always ensure that s/he is asking in a competent manner. Moreover, if you felt the use of the rubber dam was inappropriate, you would want to use alternatives and document your reasons for not using it since it has become the standard of care.

I understand the frustration that medical professionals have with the malpractice bar and the insistence on certain bright line procedures and safeguards. We all may agree that our society has become far too litigious. We may agree that as a result, professionals are forced to employ unnecessary and costly safeguards. Having said that, it is still considered a standard of care to utilize a rubber dam in root canals and you do not want to be the test case challenging that standard.

General risk management advice is tried and tested. As a professional, you always want to safeguard against risks. You want to take pre-operative and post-operative X-rays and follow up with patients after a significant procedure. You want to ensure adequate consent and a thorough (and documented) discussion of the risks and expectations for the patient.

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