Periodontal esthetics with soft-tissue lasers

By David L. Hoexter, DMD, FACD, FICD
Editor in Chief

The use of lasers in dentistry — and in medical procedures in general — has made great strides in recent years, not only in effectiveness but also in acceptance by patients. Our colleagues in medicine, such as dermatologists and ophthalmologists, have used lasers for years for myriad reasons. Visiting a dermatologist’s office recently, I observed a variety of large, bulky and costly lasers. The different types have been needed because the doctor’s choice of laser power source will vary based on the desired outcome goals for the procedure. Dermatological procedures are chiefly concerned with soft tissue — its responses and reactions defensively as well as offensively. As has been true with general medical uses of lasers, the laser systems recommended for dentistry have been relegated primarily to soft-tissue procedures. The reason for this is that with the exception of relatively recently introduced technology, using lasers on hard tissue in dentistry would typically cause desication of the tooth or bone being treated.

Fig. 1: Dense hyperplastic tissue interproximally between the tooth #11 and tooth #12. Because the hyperplastic overgrowth inhibits accessibility, the patient is unable to reach the desired area to maintain good oral hygiene. Photos/Provided by Dr. David L. Hoexter

Clinical

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The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) 33rd Annual Scientific Session will be held from April 18–21 (Tuesday–Friday), in Las Vegas, Nevada. The conference, described by organizers as “the world’s largest continuing education program for cosmetic dentistry,” will feature more than 35 hands-on workshops, 60 lectures and 300 speakers. The annual event typically draws between 1,300 to 1,500 dental professionals and includes courses and events serving dentists, lab technicians, hygienists, and dental team members to help them refine their skills, learn the latest techniques and share ideas.

General session speakers
The 2017 conference will take place at the Venetian Resort Hotel & Casino and will feature three groups of educators: the “Legends,” the “Illusionists” and the “High Rollers,” who will reveal their techniques and share their expertise.

The Venetian Resort Hotel & Casino is one of Forbes Travel Guide’s Four-Star hotels for the 13th year in a row and has been described as one of the most popular motivational environments outside of your industry. Attendees will collaborate, think creatively, turn liabilities to assets and find ideas quicker to respond to change. Hanson will show how great teams create relationships that last a lifetime.

• Dr. Jackie Freiberg will lay out the preconditions leaders must create to ensure that “innovation” is a deeply embedded part of your practice’s cultural DNA, where teams are hungry for change and inspired to find innovative ways to overcome challenges in part by reducing costs while improving quality of patient care. Freiberg will share strategies for collaborating, thinking creatively, turning liabilities to assets and finding ideas outside of your industry. Attendees will learn how the most creative companies in the world innovate beyond customer expectations.

The AACD is a recognized credit provider for the Academy of General Dentistry, the American Dental Association, and the National Association of Dental Laboratories.

Learn more about the annual meeting at www.aacdconference.com.

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leaving the affected hard tissue dry and brittle. Early laser technology that was promoted as appropriate for hard-tissue procedures made lots of noise, cost lots of money and at best achieved minimal and limited results. Recently, however, new laser technology for use on hard-tissue dental structures has proved to be more capable of meeting goals of both practicality and effectiveness.

This article, though, will limit its focus to the soft-tissue side: specifically, achieving desired esthetic results by using soft-tissue laser technology to treat gingival hyperplasia.

My personal experience with lasers dates back more than 25 years to when I bought a CO₂ laser for my private practice. It was an adventurous and costly (about $60,000 in early ’90s dollars) commitment. There were no laser dental societies back then—just a few of us dentists trying to find newer techniques to more effectively and comfortably achieve the results our patients desired.

Hyperplasia of epithelial tissue of the gingival area breaks the smooth appearance of the periodontal tissue, compromising esthetic goals. It also makes it difficult for patients to maintain good oral hygiene, leading to inflammation of tissue and increasing risk of progression to periodontitis.

Case 1

As illustrated in Fig. 1, a patient presented in my office with a singular localized dense hyperplastic area, confirmed through oral examination. The 31-year-old female had neat clothes and clean, well-maintained hands and nails. She related how difficult the local area was to clean, describing that cleaning efforts hurt and caused bleeding, especially when she flossed. The local area also didn’t look clean visually, creating an uneven area. As illustrated in Fig. 2, a patient present ed in my office with a singular localized edematous, easily bleeding tissue. The edema was treated in the maxillary anterior area, as well as a composite filled area. The figures and captions document the treatment of a simple low-heat plastic tissue area, as well as a complex acutely inflamed hyperplastic area.

Conclusion

In both of these cases, the patients were treated by using a soft-tissue laser to achieve correct, desired results. While any soft-tissue laser system might have achieved similar results, in these cases, a diode AMD Picasso laser was used.

I chose this particular laser primarily because of what I consider to be its reasonable cost when compared with others, its ease of use and the disposable tips that make it easy to maintain sterility.

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