C Maintain Your Dental Equipment

Even though you and your staff may be following correct dental procedures, equipment failures can result in malpractice situations. You should make sure you understand how to keep your equipment functioning at its peak, including using regular inspections and maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer.

case history

Curing Light Malfunction

A faulty curing light was used to cure composite restorations. As a result, within months some of the new restorations wore through and required replacement.

According to distributors of the equipment, the curing light needed to operate in a very specific frequency range to provide optimal curing of composite restoration material. In this case, the curing light did not emit sufficient energy to make the material set satisfactorily. The problem could have been avoided if the light had been tested with a manufacturer-approved instrument with the assistance of the practitioner's dental supply company. The total cost of the resulting malpractice claim was $12,500 including an award of $11,000 to the patient.

D Keep Complete Records

In court, if a patient claims you did (or did not) do something, your records are your chief way to dispute their testimony.

You should keep a separate file for each patient. To avoid confusion, don't keep information on multiple patients in a "family" file. The patient should be clearly identified on the file (some dentists attach patient photos).

In the file, you should include complete remarks on treatment in a legible and clearly understood manner. Include observations about the patient's behaviour, but it is imperative that you keep these statements objective.

Your records should describe all your treatment recommendations and the patient's responses to them. Include information about any drugs you provide or prescribe, the dosages, and the conditions justifying the prescriptions. Make a note about any discussions you had with your patient regarding potential risks and side effects of the treatment.