General dentists want more information on endodontics

The American Association of Endodontists has released results from a survey of general dentists regarding the perceptions and realities of endodontic continuing education in America.

The fundamental finding from general dentists across the country: Unbiased education on the latest endodontic materials and techniques is essential for their continued practice.

While general dentists vary in their handling of root canal work, nearly half of the general dentists surveyed indicated that they refer all or most of their root canals to specialists. The average generalist reported performing only two root canal treatments a month.

Although nearly 90 percent of respondents reported that they are at least somewhat comfortable with their overall knowledge and understanding of endodontics, most dentists admit they would like to know more.

"As any good practitioner, general dentists want to ensure they are providing the highest quality care to their patients," said AAE President Marc Balson, D.D.S. "With up to three additional years of specialized training, endodontists are uniquely trained to perform root canals. This gives us not only the experience to treat the most complex cases, but to serve general dentists as valuable members of the dental team."

More than half of general dentists reported taking no endodontic CE courses in the year preceding the survey. In contrast, fully 95 percent of respondents have consulted with an endodontist in the same timeframe. Respondents viewed educational institutions and professional organizations, including the AAE, as the most credible providers of CE courses.

Other compelling survey results include the opinion among general dentists that endodontists are trusted partners in providing high-quality dental care. Fully 72 percent believe that endodontists are willing to help them learn more about endodontics, and two-thirds of general dentists would like to learn from a local specialist.

Topics of most interest include rotary instrumentation systems, obturation techniques, and endodontic diagnosis and troubleshooting.

"Endodontists and general dentists have always shared positive and mutually beneficial partnerships," said Balson. "The AAE is excited to continue to build upon that relationship by matching our educational outreach to what general dentists want to learn."

As a result of findings from the survey, the AAE plans to bolster its educational outreach to general dentists by developing targeted educational publications and resources geared to them. The Association
has already initiated a redesign of its clinical newsletter titled, ENDODONTICS: Colleagues for Excellence, which is mailed to all general dentist members of the American Dental Association.

The expanded newsletter will address topics including the latest in endodontic instrumentation and techniques, focusing on practical examples and references for general dentists.

Additionally, the AAE plans to aggressively promote its Web site, www.aae.org, which features a separate section devoted to dental professionals.

The site’s expanded content will not only provide access to electronic reference materials, such as AAE position statements and guidelines, but also archives of the ENDODONTICS: Colleagues for Excellence newsletter, a discussion board for general dentists and other interactive educational tools to be developed in the future.

The association also is strongly encouraging its own members to reach out to their referring dentists with support and offers to serve in an educational capacity.

The 2005 survey of general dentists is part of the AAE’s public awareness campaign, Endodontists: the root canal specialists, whose goal is to educate the public and general dentists about the value that endodontists bring to the dental team.