

# **PE2115/A: Ensure NHS dental patients have the option of white composite fillings for the treatment of molar teeth**

## **Scottish Government written submission, 26 September 2024**

The primary focus of NHS General Dental Services in Scotland is to provide care to maintain the oral health of patients. Currently around 95% of the Scottish population are registered with an NHS dentist. It is essential that the service is able to provide an evidence based package of care that both meets the clinical demands of maintaining oral health and the Scottish Government requirement that it represents value for money. The use of white composite fillings for what would be considered aesthetic rather than oral health reasons means that continued use of dental amalgam remains an essential element to meeting these goals.

Dental amalgam is one of a small number of materials available for restoring teeth. Other materials include, but are not limited to resin composite. Dental amalgam has been used successfully for more than 150 years and has been proven to provide lasting, reliable restorations. The material is relatively cheap to provide and is simple to place, being far less technique sensitive when compared to resin composite. It is far less challenging to place than resin composite under the sub-optimal conditions that often present in patients with significant oral disease.

In 2021 the Cochrane Library undertook a systematic review of published studies which compared success rates of dental amalgam and resin composite restorations for posterior teeth. This review showed that resin composite had a 5-7 year failure rate that is twice that of dental amalgam. Resin composite restorations showed 142 failures per 1000 restorations compared with 75 failures per 1000 restorations for amalgam. The failures were in large part due to recurrence of disease. This represents a significant cost in terms of the financial burden to the public purse in addition to a much greater clinical cost to patients as composite fillings on posterior teeth would need to be replaced much more frequently.

Resin composite is considered the material of choice for restoring teeth at the front of the mouth where they perform reliably better due to the reduced functional loads involved. Additionally, the Scottish Government recognises the strong direction from the European Union in 2018 around the use of dental amalgam in specific target groups. This has led to resin composite being available to patients under 15 years of age, pregnant or breast-feeding women and those who have specific medical conditions that contraindicate the use of dental amalgam.

The Scottish Government introduced significant reform of the NHS dental sector in 2023 which aims to allow dentists to offer far more effective preventive care. The overall aim of this policy is to reduce the requirement for all restorations regardless of material used. In this way we aim to reduce the burden of oral disease along with the need to use dental amalgam.

The view of Scottish Government would therefore be that to include white fillings in all cases for aesthetic reasons in the absence of an oral health rationale would not be supported within NHS general dental services.

I trust this is a helpful response in the first instance.

**Chief Dental Officer**