Dear reader,

When GSK recently announced that it is to remove zinc from their denture creams, there was outcry from customer protection agencies around the world. Almost at the same time, a website in the US warned that asbestos fibres found in some dental products can be harmful to dentists. No outcry was heard from the dental community.

Similar to most health professionals, dentists have to face an array of hazards in their daily working lives. These are in the form of not only infectious diseases, but also substances found in dental materials and equipment that pose health threats to dentists. Although these threats are not acute, studies have demonstrated that long-term exposure has the potential to damage their health.

Dentists traditionally place much trust in manufacturers, mainly because they have become comfortable using a certain product throughout their career and are hesitant to change. However, they should become more aware that they too are customers and if something seems odd, questions should be raised.

If products can be made safer for the health of the masses, they can certainly be made safer for professionals.

Yours sincerely,
Daniel Zimmermann
Group Editor
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Claudia Salwiczek

Two weeks ago, the 21st Winter Olympics ended with the passing on of the Olympic torch from Vancouver to Sochi in Russia. All the excitement and records aside, what remains are images of many athletes failing at their respective disciplines. Never before have the Games pushed the physical limits of what the human body can accomplish. Sadly, one athlete from Georgia lost his life after leaving the track at high speed during the men’s luge competition.

One major issue overshadowed by these tragedies is oral health. It seems that athletes and officials alike are not paying much attention to this problem, maybe because a healthy mouth and teeth are not considered relevant to top performance. This assumption is certainly wrong. Pain resulting from tooth decay, root-canal infection or gum disease can trouble athletes to such an extent that they are not able to compete. In addition, UV radiation accumulated over a long time in sports like the biathlon or cross-country can significantly increase the risk of developing oral cancer.

The International Olympic Committee’s decision to screen more athletes for oral lesions this year is a step in the right direction and an acknowledgement that oral health forms part of general health. However, having these examinations every four years won’t change much in the general oral-health behaviour of athletes. Dentists, physicians and training staff need to drive home to them that a little investment in their mouths will help to remain more healthy not only during their active career, but also later in life.

Let’s hope that the competition for better oral health will already have begun when the Olympic flame shines over Sochi in 2014.

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