US lab to sequence DNA from John Lennon’s tooth

EDMONTON, Canada: Dr Michael Zuk, the Canadian dentist who bought one of John Lennon’s molars for US$50,000 at an auction almost two years ago, has partnered with a laboratory in the US to extract the musician’s genetic code from the tooth.

“I am nervous and excited at the possibility that we will be able to fully sequence John Lennon’s DNA, very soon I hope. With researchers working on ways to clone mammoths, the same technology certainly could make human cloning reality,” Zuk said.

Further details of the research project are still being kept confidential. Zuk told Dental Tribune that he had asked the scientists to halt any procedures until the interest of a film crew to document each step has been secured.

In the 1960s, the famous John Lennon gave the tooth to his housekeeper, whose family auctioned it in November 2011. The tooth has appeared in a number of media reports and television documentaries since then. Last year, Zuk partnered with celebrity jeweler Ari Soffer to design three John Lennon DNA pendants valued at US$25,000 each. Within the scope of a mouth cancer awareness campaign, one pendant was sent to a group of dentists in the UK who were offering free mouth cancer screening. With his blog “The Un-Cosmetic Dentist”, Zuk is also a regular contributor for the Dental Tribune website.

Ban removed on HIV-positive dental staff

LONDON, UK: The UK Department of Health recently announced that it will be modernising the HIV rules that were implemented in the 1980s to protect the public better. Part of the plan is to allow doctors, nurses and other skilled health care workers with HIV who are undergoing treatment to perform certain medical procedures from which they are currently banned.

Following independent scientific advice, the department will lift the ban on health care workers with HIV being able to carry out certain dental and surgical procedures from April 2014. However, strict rules on treatment, monitoring and testing will be implemented as well to safeguard patients. With this reform, UK authorities aim to bring the country in line with other nations, such as Sweden, France, Canada and New Zealand. Based on case-by-case decisions, HIV-infected dentists may be allowed to carry out procedures if they are on effective combination antiretroviral drug therapy, have an undetectable viral load and are regularly monitored by a physician. The department is now planning to establish a programme to register and monitor health care workers who have HIV.

According to the department, there is no record of any patient ever being infected through a health care worker in the UK. There have been only four cases worldwide. In 1992, a dentist in Florida in the USA transmitted HIV to six patients. In 1999, a French orthopaedic surgeon transmitted the virus to one patient. A woman was infected during a Caesarean section by a Spanish gynaecologist in 2003. An additional case was reported in 2000, when a nurse in France transmitted HIV to a patient. However, the exact route of transmission is unclear in this case.