

FROM THE BBC WEBSITE THURSDAY 19TH APRIL 2007

Dentists have been told not to re-use instruments for root canal work because of a possibility they could infect patients with variant CJD.

The government's chief dental officer for England said there had been no cases of transmission, but research had shown a potential risk.

The recommendation is based on guidance from the expert Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

It applies to instruments known as files and reamers.

These are used in endodontic procedures, most often to remove dead or damaged tissue from the root canal of a tooth.

Dr Barry Cockcroft, the chief dental officer for England, said: "There are no reported definite or suspected cases of vCJD transmission arising from dental procedures

This new guidance to dentists is purely an extra precaution. The public should continue to attend their dentist as normal"

Now read on.....

WEDNESDAY 18TH APRIL

Sir Humphrey was briefing the Minister.

"The CDO thought that if we stop paying them for doing endodontics..."

"Sorry Sir Humphrey, please explain"

"Root canal work, Minister, very tedious & time consuming, it's what that man at Lister House did to you when you had the abscess"

"Oh Lord that, dreadful experience, all that rubbery stuff & the whiff of swimming pools"

Quite so Minister, if I may continue"

"Please do so Humphrey"

"Well as I was saying the CDO & his team, a woman called Audrey as I recall, said that if we stopped paying them for this time consuming, tedious business then they would stop doing it. Because apparently once they have done it then they go and spend more taxpayers money putting caps on the teeth instead of just pulling them and make plastic ones."

"Ah plastic, very high tech, none of that industrial revolution metal stuff, excellent. My parents both had those, lasted a lifetime, Prescott has them, saw him playing with them in cabinet once. Hard wearing and British"

"Frequently Minister"

"So what about these canal works, Humphrey?"

"Well Minister would you believe it that in spite of the financial disincentive vis-à-vis the extraction & prosthetic replacement methodology the fang farriers, who we always had marked down as being far more financially ahem responsive than their medical counterparts, are still doing them."

"Doing what, Humphrey?"

"Root nerve work, Minister."

"What? For nothing?"

"Quite so Minister."

"How wonderfully public spirited & responsible of them, Humphrey."

"Not at all Minister."

"Oh..why not?"

"Well by saving the teeth they are then making more work for themselves, which of course is using up treasury money and remember we don't want to upset the Chancellor just at the moment because come May when Gordon moves to number 10 and there's a reshuffle he'll remember which departments were prudent and which were difficult to financially administer Minister "

"Of course Humphrey, still we are talking about the health of the nation here."

"With all due respect Minister we're talking about how the health of the nation is being threatened by those greedy dentists doing unnecessary work so they can buy themselves another new BMW, after all that's why we weren't paying for it. All they

want us to do is to divert funds from dealing with the proper sick & needy, hard working families.”

"OK Humphrey let's cut to the chase, as George Dubya might say, what has the CDO come up with?"

"BSE Minister."

"BSE Humphrey?"

"Precisely Minister, it hasn't had its turn on the health fear roundabout for a while."

"But what have dentists got to do with mad cows?"

"Prions, Minister."

"Prions, Humphrey? you do talk in riddles sometime."

"The CDO tells me that there was some research published in Romania or some similar place saying that you might catch mad cow disease from mice teeth.

Apparently these Prions might grow in the nervy middles of rodent gnashers."

"Seems a little bit far fetched, Humphrey."

(Aside)"We went to war with less."

"Sorry Humphrey?"

"Scientific test, Minister."

"In that case we had better take steps! Er what does Barty Cockrell suggest?"

"Disposable instruments, Minister."

"What like we forced the ENT people to do? Because that just came back and bit us in the backside"

"No Minister, proper instruments just used once."

"Well won't that be even more expensive for us & the PCTs?"

"Not at all Minister, if the dentists choose to do the work for nothing, then they can hardly expect us to bail them out can they?"

After all they are independent practitioners,

ASIDE .."Which is one of the reasons they have been so easy to shaft."

"Didn't catch that Humphrey."

"Devoted to their craft, Minister."

"Well that's as maybe, how do we do this with the dentists' co-operation?"

"The usual way Minister; Rosie's poodle...."

"Who?"

"Sorry Minister, the CDO, will write a letter to all the dentists which will go to the mailroom on Thursday, there's a new person there who we have had to take on as part of our disability employment quota and she will stick the stamps on personally, one by one, and then when they're all done she will take them to the post box on the corner."

"Glad to see we're doing our bit for disability discrimination, Humphrey. What's the problem with the poor soul?"

"Something called xerostomia* Minister." (*that's the term for dry-mouth)

"Clear as mud Humphrey, do go on."

"In the meantime the spin team, sorry the press office, will be releasing information to the Daily Mail along the sensitive lines of "Dentists try to quell rumours of them causing BSE outbreak", Jeremy Vine will be doing a two hour special on there not being a real problem and we're bringing back good old Tom Mangold for a prime time TV documentary so that the country knows what is going on."

"Excellent Humphrey, education, education, education. TB will be pleased."

"It's not very wise to call him that Minister, he's been very touchy on the subject since Patricia Hewitt referred to the control of TB as a priority."

"So Humphrey we help to eradicate the spread of CJD, we safeguard the health of the nation, we prevent the dentists killing themselves by doing unnecessary treatments, and we avoid the waste of public funds. A triumph again."

"Yes Minister."