Sharpening dental hand instruments

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Maintaining dental instruments is critical for efficient and proper dental cleanings. Sharp instruments are more efficient and less traumatizing to the teeth and soft tissues. More importantly, it has been shown that dull instruments simply burnish the calculus as opposed to actually removing it. This gives the illusion of a clean tooth which is actually still infected.

Bringing a very dull instrument back to a sharp edge and useful condition is very hard to impossible. Therefore, instruments which are used regularly should be maintained on at least a weekly basis to maintain an edge. If no sharpening has been performed for months to years, it may be best to purchase new instruments and maintain the new instruments.

Below is a step by step description on maintaining hand instruments. Veterinary staff should study this in detail prior to undertaking this task. Further, this technique is taught during the basic periodontal therapy lab at the San Diego veterinary Dental Training Center. Finally, SCVDS has recently introduced a sharpening service. For information on either of these offerings please visit our website www.dogbeachvet.com.

We recommend an Arkansas stone and sharpening oil for hand instrument care. These can be purchased from any dental distributor.

1) Apply a small amount of oil on the stone. (Figure 1)
2) Hold the instrument in one hand and the stone in the other. Place the instrument on the stone as it would be used for scaling. This means that the shank (or terminal end of the instrument) is parallel to the stone (figure 2).

3) Over rotate the instrument 20 degrees from this angle to create the create edge (Figure 3)

4) For curettes Place the instrument so that the heal is against the stone. (Figure 3)
5) Keep the instrument still and move the stone in short, firm up and down motions. Always end on the down stroke to avoid burring. (Figure 4)

6) Continue forward on the tooth to maintain the shape of the instrument. To maintain its shape. Straight across for scaler and on a curve for curettes. (Figure 5)

7) Sharpness can be checked with an acrylic block. (Figure 6)