

## **Internet-supported hazardous substances management system for doctors' and dentists' practices**

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The German Institution for statutory accident insurance and prevention in the health and welfare services (BGW) has the task of advising companies in all questions of safety and health protection. Employees in medical and dental practices can be exposed to chemical hazards through disinfectants, inhalation anesthetics, laboratory chemicals, X-ray chemicals or special drugs. However, as in many small-sized companies, the awareness of legislation relating to hazardous substances may sometimes be low. The BGW has therefore developed a web-based consultation and advice tool specially tailored for medical and dental practices: "The Virtual Practice", offering comprehensive information and assistance on the use and handling of hazardous substances. This tool is available free on the Internet under [www.bgw-online.de/virtuell](http://www.bgw-online.de/virtuell).

The main target group comprises independent doctors and dentists, since it is they as the owners of the practice who are responsible for the implementation of work safety regulations. The safe use and handling of hazardous substances is also an important element of quality assurance. The website also represents a useful source of information for other staff in the practice and for health services in general. The tool is therefore equally suitable for use in training, and also provides important specific information for work safety specialists. An offline version on CD-ROM is in the planning stage.

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The visitor is taken on a virtual tour through the practice, for example through the treatment room, instrument disinfection area, dental laboratory and X-ray area, and is shown which products are hazardous substances. During the tour, the visitor can compile a list of hazardous substances relevant to his own practice. Checklists then offer the facility of testing whether protective measures must be taken for the selected substances.

The "Virtual Practice" provides the practice-owner with the means of organising the hazardous substances management for his practice. He can check whether he has all the necessary information on the products used, and whether the products he has used so far can be replaced by others that

present a lower health risk. He must ensure that his staff wear suitable protective gloves in cases where skin contact with hazardous substances is possible. He must inform his staff what dangers can be caused by such substances, train them in the safe use and handling of the materials, and document this training. These topics can be dealt with step by step in the form of checklists, together with others such as storage, employment restrictions or skin protection. Available aids include sample letters to manufacturers, forms for the documentation of staff training and operating instructions, which only need to be completed with any special informations specific to his practice. Individual data can be edited and saved on the Internet page under a freely selectable password. In this way, medical practitioners and safety specialists can work with the system, also in a way which involves work-sharing. Information, lists and forms can of course also be printed out. Information on terms and definitions used in hazardous substances legislation and a summary of relevant regulations and Internet addresses extend the offer.

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