Long-term clinical success in the management of compromised intertooth spaces utilizing small-diameter implants

By Paul S. Petrungaro, DDS, MS

Management of edentulous sites in the oral cavity with dental implants has been well documented in dental literature during the past 25 plus years.1 Patients seeking tooth replacement for partial or totally edentulous situations have been able to enjoy natural appearing and functioning prostheses that are fixed, stable and, in some cases, so natural it’s difficult to ascertain a dental implant restoration from a tooth restoration. Using dental implants to replace the natural tooth system in the esthetic zone has also seen an increase in restorative treatment plans and, with the advent and perfection of immediate restoration protocols initially reported in the literature,2 achieving natural soft tissue esthetics around dental implants can be predictable and successful. However, certain clinical situations can complicate or negate the procedure altogether.

One of these complications is insufficient intertooth spacing between natural teeth and, most commonly, with congenitally missing lateral incisors following orthodontic treatment.3 Often as a solution to this, the dentist chooses a removable partial denture with some type of resin bonded bridge, both of which may not be appealing to younger individuals. In extreme cases, the dentist may elect to perform with a fixed bridge, which would cause excessive destruction to the natural teeth serving as abutments and, for a young individual, this could be devastating to these teeth during a 40-50 year period, if not sooner.4

To properly form an ovate pontic type emergence profile in the soft tissue, which is required for a fixed bridge to have a natural clinical appearance, consideration must be given to the intertooth edentulous space.5 This is also very important when choosing dental implants for natural tooth replacement. Wallace, Misch and Salama et al.6-8 stated that for a normal two-piece implant, the implant should be placed at least 1.5 mm from the adjacent teeth.

As a result, using a 3.5 mm diameter implant, the minimum inter-tooth space to support interproximal bone and natural soft tissue papillary contours should be 6.5 mm, and with a 3.0 mm diameter implant, 6.0 mm for the edentulous space. Often, the intertooth space in these situations is of smaller length.6

Taking these parameters into account, small-diameter implants (3.0 mm is the smallest from most dental implant manufacturers) should not be used in cases with less than 6.0 mm of inter-tooth space, to prevent potential tooth root damage, crestal bone loss and unnatural-appearing gingival tissues and papillae.

Small-diameter, or mini, implants were developed more than 20 years ago and, initially, the recommended use was to support temporary removable prostheses during the healing phase for advanced bone-grafting procedures and/or conventional implant placement.9-11

Their use was later expanded into immediate conversion of full dentures into implant-supported dentures for partially edentulous cases and for anchorage of single tooth implant restorations in compromised intertooth spaces.12-13

Implants are available from 1.8 mm diameter to 2.8 mm diameter and offer a fixed permanent tooth replacement option for patients who otherwise would not be able to have implants placed and restored. Their ease of use and atrophical placement utilizing a flapless approach, together with only one courting procedure, as well as simple and abutment transfer and provisional construction make the use of these implants in the aforementioned sites a must for the dental implant practice.

The following case report will demonstrate the use of the Dentatus ANEW (Dentatus USA, Ltd, New York, NY) implant for the management of the compromised, congenitally missing lateral incisor space in a 17-year old young woman with a 10-year clinical follow up.

Case report

A 17-year-old, non-smoking female presented for tooth replacement in the congenitally missing maxillary left lateral incisor site (Fig. 1). The patient had recently completed orthodontic therapy, and the orthodontist and general practitioner had agreed this was the final obtainable result in regard to the remaining intertooth space between the maxillary left central incisor and maxillary left canine (Fig. 2).

The resultant intertooth space was less than 5.0 mm, and conventional two-stage implants with abutment options were ruled out. The patient and her parents ruled out conventional tooth-replacement options and chose the minimally invasive procedure: a small-diameter implant, 1.8 mm in diameter, which would allow for natural papillary contours to be developed.

After administration of an appropriate local anesthetic, an ovate pontic contour was created utilizing a football-shaped diamond in the attached, keratinized tissue of the edentulous site (Fig. 3). This scalloped-type tissue contour helps in the creation of the natural-appearing papillary contours.

The small-diameter implant chosen, a 1.8 mm x 14 mm Dentatus ANEW Implant was then placed after a single coreing of the site with a 1.4 mm needledent® P2i to Full depth, within the sculpted tissue emergence profile previously created (Fig. 4). Conversion to an esthetic provisional restoration was completed by placing an abutment coping with a delrin retention screw (Dentatus USA, New York, NY).

An ion shell provisional crown was then hollowed out and retotaled to the abutment coping with flowable composite. The margins of the provisional were corrected and polished followed by placement of the restoration.

The restoration was polished and seated with the screw from the palatal. The immediate postoperative clinical view is seen in Fig. 5. The immediate postoperative periapical view is seen in Fig. 6.

The patient then went through the three-month healing and observation phase prior to construction of a sub-arc form yes clinical restoration (Fig. 7). One year later, the patient underwent final crown fabrication at the left lateral incisor site. A 10-year postoperative clinical image is given in Fig. 8 and a 10-year postoperative CT scan of the implant in Fig. 9.

Please note the beautiful soft-tissue esthetic result obtained and excellent maintenance of the crestal and lateral contours.

Conclusion

The management of compromised intertooth spaces presents a challenge for the contemporary dental implant team. These spaces have limitations on how they can be handled and require implants 3.50 mm wide or less, as was demonstrated in the text of this article. Availability of small-diameter implants allows patients who normally would have to proceed with a fixed bridge, or resin-bonded bridge, the luxury of dental implants with no preparation and/or reduction to the adjacent natural dentition.

Proper placement procedures and restorative techniques can lead to very esthetic results, allowing for natural tissue contours and emergence profile formation, reminiscent of the natural tooth.

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References

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Fig. 5. Immediate postoperative clinical view

Fig. 6. Immediate postoperative radiograph

Fig. 7. Lab-processed, long-term provisional restoration

Fig. 8. 10-year postoperative clinical view

Fig. 9. 10-year postoperative CT serial view


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