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Clinical significance of dental root canal microflora.

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OBJECTIVES: Previous work by this group has shown that a significant association exists between pain and the presence of either *Prevotella* or *Peptostreptococcus* spp. in dental root canals. The aim of this study was to examine a more extensive series of canals microbiologically, to determine whether any other particular endodontic symptoms or clinical signs showed specific associations with individual bacterial species. **METHODS:** Seventy root canals were examined microbiologically and clinical data collected to investigate in detail such associations. **RESULTS:** Of the canals studied, 37 were associated with pain, 49 with tenderness to percussion, 23 with swelling, six with purulent exudate and 57 presented with wet root canals. Anaerobes were isolated from 70.3% of painful canals and from 29.7% of pain-free canals. Significant associations were found between (a) pain and either *Prevotella* spp. or *peptostreptococci*, both with $P < 0.01$; (b) tenderness to percussion and *Prevotella* spp. ($P < 0.01$) or anaerobes ($P < 0.05$); (c) swelling and *Eubacterium* spp. ($P < 0.01$), or with *Prevotella* spp. or *Pstr. micros*, both with $P < 0.05$; (d) purulent exudate and any one of *F. necrophorum* ($P < 0.01$), *Prev. loescheii*, *Streptococcus constellatus* or *Bacteroides* spp. (each $P < 0.05$); (e) wet canal and facultative anaerobes ($P < 0.01$), and any one of the genera of *Eubacterium*, *Peptostreptococcus*, *Prevotella* or *Propionibacterium* (each $P < 0.05$). **CONCLUSION:** It was concluded that several different endodontic clinical signs and symptoms are significantly associated with specific bacterial species.

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