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Intraradicular bacteria and fungi in root-filled, asymptomatic human teeth with therapy-resistant periapical lesions: a long-term light and electron microscopic follow-up study.

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Light and electron microscopy were used to analyze nine therapy-resistant and asymptomatic human periapical lesions, which were removed as block biopsies during surgical treatment of the affected teeth. The cases that required surgery represented about 10% of all of the cases which received endodontic treatment and root fillings during the period 1977 to 1984. These cases revealed periapical lesions when they were examined 4 to 10 yr after treatment. The biopsies were processed for correlated light and electron microscopy. Six of the nine biopsies revealed the presence of microorganisms in the apical root canal. Four contained one or more species of bacteria and two revealed yeasts. Of the four cases in which bacteria were found, only in one biopsy could they be found by light microscope. In the other three specimens, the bacterial presence could be confirmed only after repeated electron microscopic examination of the apical root canal by serial step-cutting technique. Among the three cases in which no microorganisms could be encountered, one showed histopathological features of a foreign body giant cell granuloma. These findings suggest that in the majority of root-filled human teeth with therapy-resistant periapical lesions, microorganisms may persist and may play a significant role in endodontic treatment failures. In certain instances such lesions may also be sustained by foreign body giant cell type of tissue responses at the periapex of root-filled teeth.

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