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Review Article

The effectiveness of direct versus indirect restoration techniques following canal therapy

Waleed K. Alshargawi[1]*, Feras E. Tawhari[2], Ameerah S. Aladwani[3], Zyad A. Hassanein[4], Sahar N. Fageeh[5], Ahmed W. Almeshrf[3], Saud F. Alamani[6], Aymen A. Neyaz[7], Asraa W. Albalbisi[8], Belal M. Alsadiq[9], Abdulrahman A. Alasmari[10]

[1]Department of Endodontics, Al Thager Hospital, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
[2]College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[3]College of Dentistry, Batterjee Medical College, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
[4]Department of Advanced General Dentistry, King Abdulaziz University Dental Hospital, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
[5]Dental Department, Dhurma General Hospital, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[6]Dental Department, RAM Clinics, Khobar, Saudi Arabia
[7]Department of Restorative Dentistry, Noble Smile Dental Clinic, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[8]College of Dentistry, Vision Colleges, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
[9]College of Dentistry, Buraydah College, Medina, Saudi Arabia
[10]Dental Department – Primary Healthcare, Ministry of Health, Abha, Saudi Arabia

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***Correspondence:**
Dr. Waleed K. Alshargawi,
E-mail: waldosh55@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The restoration of endodontically treated teeth is a critical aspect of dental practice, with the choice between direct and indirect restoration techniques being central to optimizing clinical outcomes. Direct restorations, such as composite resins, offer advantages in terms of cost, time efficiency, and preservation of tooth structure. However, their long-term performance, particularly in posterior teeth, may be compromised by issues such as marginal leakage, wear, and discoloration. Indirect restorations, including crowns, onlays, and inlays, provide enhanced durability, fracture resistance, and aesthetic outcomes, particularly for teeth that have undergone significant structural loss. These restorations, often made from ceramics or metals, offer superior longevity but come with higher costs and longer treatment times. The aesthetic performance of restorations plays a significant role in patient satisfaction. While direct restorations allow for immediate aesthetic adjustments and are generally more affordable, they may suffer from discoloration and wear over time. Indirect restorations, particularly porcelain-based options, offer better color stability and natural appearance, making them a preferred choice for patients with high aesthetic demands. Cost-effectiveness is another critical factor influencing clinical decision-making. While direct restorations are more affordable initially, their long-term cost-effectiveness may be compromised by the need for repairs or replacements. Indirect restorations, despite their higher upfront cost, often prove to be more economical in the long run due to their durability and reduced need for maintenance. The decision between direct and indirect restoration techniques should be individualized, considering factors such as tooth location, the extent of damage, aesthetic requirements, and financial constraints. A comprehensive evaluation of these factors, along with clear communication with the patient, is essential for achieving optimal clinical outcomes. Indirect restorations generally offer better long-term performance, particularly for heavily compromised teeth, while direct restorations remain a viable option for cases where cost and time efficiency are prioritized.

Keywords: Endodontic therapy, Direct restorations, Indirect restorations, Dental aesthetics, Cost-effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Endodontic therapy, commonly referred to as root canal treatment, is a widely performed dental procedure aimed at preserving a tooth that has been severely compromised by decay or trauma. Following successful canal therapy, restoring the tooth's function and aesthetics becomes paramount. This can be achieved through various restoration techniques, primarily categorized into direct and indirect methods. Direct restoration involves placing a filling material directly into the tooth cavity in a single visit, while indirect restoration requires fabricating the restoration outside the mouth, which is later bonded to the tooth, often necessitating multiple visits.

The choice between direct and indirect restoration techniques depends on various factors, including the extent of tooth damage, aesthetic requirements, and financial considerations. Direct restorations, typically involving materials like composite resins, are favored for their simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and ability to preserve more natural tooth structure.[1] However, their durability, especially in posterior teeth subject to heavy occlusal forces, remains a subject of debate. Indirect restorations, such as crowns, inlays, or onlays, are often preferred for teeth that have undergone significant structural compromise post-endodontic therapy. These restorations are fabricated from materials like ceramics or metals, offering superior strength and longevity compared to direct restorations.[2] Despite their advantages, indirect restorations come with higher costs, longer treatment times, and the need for temporary restorations during the fabrication process.[3]

A key concern in the restorative decision-making process is the long-term success of the restoration. Studies have shown that while direct restorations may offer satisfactory outcomes in the short term, indirect restorations tend to demonstrate better performance in terms of longevity and resistance to fracture over extended periods.[4,5] Additionally, patient preferences, aesthetic demands, and clinical expertise also play significant roles in determining the most suitable restoration technique following canal therapy. This review aims to critically assess the effectiveness of direct versus indirect restoration techniques following canal therapy.

REVIEW

The choice between direct and indirect restoration techniques following canal therapy has long been debated in clinical practice. Direct restorations, such as composite resins, offer the advantage of being minimally invasive and cost-effective. They preserve more of the natural tooth structure and can be completed in a single visit. However, their long-term durability, especially in molars subjected to significant masticatory forces, has been questioned. Research has indicated that direct restorations may have a higher risk of failure over time due to marginal leakage and material wear.[5] On the other hand, indirect restorations, including crowns and onlays, provide superior structural support and are generally more resistant to fracture and wear. These restorations are particularly beneficial for teeth that have been significantly weakened by endodontic treatment. Studies have shown that teeth restored with indirect methods have a higher survival rate compared to those treated with direct restorations.[6] However, the higher cost and longer treatment time associated with indirect restorations can be a deterrent for some patients.

Longevity and durability comparison

The longevity and durability of restorations following canal therapy are critical factors in determining the success of endodontic treatment. The choice between direct and indirect restorations hinges on the ability of these restorations to withstand functional loads and resist wear over time. Direct restorations, particularly composite resins, are often favored for their ease of application and ability to conserve tooth structure. However, their long-term performance, especially in posterior teeth subjected to heavy occlusal forces, has been questioned. Studies have shown that direct restorations may be prone to marginal leakage, secondary caries, and material degradation over time, leading to a higher failure rate compared to indirect restorations.[7]

Indirect restorations, such as crowns, onlays, and inlays, offer enhanced structural support and longevity, particularly for teeth that have undergone significant structural loss due to endodontic therapy. These restorations are fabricated from materials like ceramics and metals, which provide superior strength and resistance to fracture. Research has consistently demonstrated that teeth restored with indirect methods have a higher survival rate compared to those treated with direct restorations. For instance, one study found that teeth restored with indirect restorations had a survival rate of up to 95% after 10 years, compared to a significantly lower survival rate for teeth treated with direct restorations.[8]

The differences in longevity between direct and indirect restorations can be attributed to several factors. First, indirect restorations provide better protection against fractures by covering the entire tooth structure or the compromised portions of it. This is particularly important for endodontically treated teeth, which are more brittle and susceptible to fractures due to the loss of moisture content. Second, the materials used in indirect restorations, such as ceramics and gold alloys, are more durable and resistant to wear compared to composite resins used in direct restorations.[9] However, despite the superior longevity of indirect restorations, they are not without drawbacks. The higher cost and longer treatment time, as well as the need for multiple appointments and temporary restorations, can be disadvantages for some patients. Additionally, indirect restorations may require more extensive tooth preparation, which could further weaken the tooth structure. Therefore, the decision between direct and indirect restorations should be individualized, considering factors such as the location

of the tooth, the extent of structural damage, and the patient's financial and aesthetic preferences. While both direct and indirect restorations have their respective advantages and limitations, indirect restorations generally offer better longevity and durability, making them a preferred option for teeth that have undergone significant structural compromise following canal therapy.

Aesthetic outcomes and patient perspectives

Aesthetic outcomes are increasingly important in restorative dentistry, particularly following canal therapy. Patients often prioritize the appearance of their restored teeth, especially in anterior regions, where cosmetic considerations are paramount. The choice between direct and indirect restorations can significantly impact the aesthetic outcome, as well as the patient's overall satisfaction with the treatment.

Direct restorations, particularly composite resins, are highly favored for their aesthetic versatility. These materials can be precisely color-matched to the patient's natural teeth, providing a seamless integration that is often difficult to distinguish from the surrounding dentition.[10] Furthermore, direct restorations can be sculpted and adjusted chairside, allowing for immediate feedback from the patient and fine-tuning of the aesthetics. This immediacy in achieving the desired appearance is a significant advantage, particularly for patients who value quick and visually appealing results. However, the aesthetic performance of direct restorations can diminish over time due to discoloration and wear. Composite resins are prone to staining from food, beverages, and smoking, which can lead to a compromised appearance over the years.[11] Additionally, the wear resistance of composites is lower than that of indirect materials, potentially leading to surface roughness and loss of luster, which may affect the patient's perception of the restoration's longevity.

Indirect restorations, such as porcelain or ceramic crowns, offer superior aesthetics in terms of translucency and color stability. These materials mimic the natural enamel more closely than composite resins, providing a highly polished and durable finish that is resistant to staining and discoloration.[12] This makes indirect restorations particularly suitable for patients with high aesthetic demands, especially in the anterior region. Moreover, the fabrication of these restorations in a dental laboratory allows for meticulous customization, ensuring that the final product meets the patient's specific aesthetic expectations. Despite the aesthetic superiority of indirect restorations, patient perspectives on the process may vary. Some patients may find the multiple visits and the need for temporary restorations to be inconvenient and disruptive, particularly when compared to the single-visit nature of direct restorations. Additionally, the higher cost associated with indirect restorations can be a deterrent, especially for patients who may not perceive the long-term aesthetic benefits as justifying the initial investment.

Patient satisfaction with the aesthetic outcome of restorations is often linked to their expectations and the communication between the patient and clinician. Ensuring that patients have a clear understanding of the aesthetic potential and limitations of both direct and indirect restorations is crucial in achieving a positive outcome. Clinicians must consider both the objective aesthetic properties of the materials and the subjective preferences of the patient when deciding on the most appropriate restoration technique. While both direct and indirect restorations can achieve satisfactory aesthetic outcomes, indirect restorations generally provide superior color stability and natural appearance over time. However, patient perspectives, including convenience, cost, and aesthetic priorities, play a critical role in determining the optimal restorative approach.

Cost-effectiveness and clinical decision-making

The cost-effectiveness of restorative techniques following canal therapy is a significant factor influencing clinical decision-making. Both direct and indirect restorations present distinct economic considerations, which must be weighed alongside clinical outcomes to determine the most appropriate treatment approach for each patient.

Direct restorations, such as composite fillings, are often seen as more cost-effective due to their lower upfront costs and the ability to complete the procedure in a single visit. For patients with financial constraints, this immediacy and affordability make direct restorations an attractive option.[13] Additionally, the reduced need for extensive laboratory work and fewer appointments further enhance the cost-effectiveness of direct restorations, particularly in cases where aesthetic demands are moderate and the restoration is not subjected to heavy occlusal forces. However, the cost-effectiveness of direct restorations must be evaluated over the long term. While the initial cost is lower, direct restorations may require more frequent repairs or replacements due to their susceptibility to wear, marginal breakdown, and discoloration over time.[14] These cumulative costs can offset the initial savings, making direct restorations less economical in the long run, especially for teeth that undergo significant functional stress, such as molars.

Indirect restorations, although more expensive initially, often prove to be more cost-effective over the long term due to their durability and lower maintenance requirements. Materials such as porcelain or gold alloys used in crowns, onlays, and inlays are more resistant to wear and fracture, leading to fewer replacements and repairs. For patients seeking a long-term solution with minimal follow-up care, the higher upfront cost of indirect restorations may be justified by the extended lifespan and reduced need for additional treatments. In clinical decision-making, cost considerations must be balanced with the specific needs of the patient. For example, a patient with a heavily compromised tooth may benefit more from an indirect restoration despite the higher initial

cost, as it offers superior protection and longevity. Conversely, for patients with less extensive damage or those who prioritize affordability, direct restorations may be a more practical choice.[15]

The clinician's expertise and experience also play a crucial role in the decision-making process. A thorough assessment of the tooth's condition, patient preferences, and financial considerations is essential in selecting the appropriate restorative technique. Moreover, clear communication with the patient regarding the potential costs and benefits of each option is vital in ensuring that the chosen restoration aligns with both the clinical goals and the patient's expectations. Direct restorations offer a cost-effective solution in the short term while indirect restorations may provide greater value over time due to their durability and reduced need for maintenance. Clinical decision-making should take into account both the immediate and long-term financial implications, as well as the patient's specific clinical and personal circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The choice between direct and indirect restorations following canal therapy should be guided by a balance of clinical needs, patient preferences, and long-term cost considerations. Indirect restorations generally offer superior durability and aesthetics, making them ideal for compromised teeth, while direct restorations are more suitable for cases requiring affordability and time efficiency. A personalized approach, considering both functional and aesthetic outcomes, is essential for achieving optimal patient satisfaction. Clear communication between the clinician and patient is key in making informed restorative decisions.

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