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Caries Management in France – Evolution Between 2002 and 2023

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Objectives The aim was to assess variations in restorative management of approximal and occlusal carious lesions in permanent teeth between 2002 and 2023.

Methods A cross-sectional, online questionnaire survey was carried out amongst 688 dentists, members of the dental practice-based research network in France (ReCOL). Bivariate comparisons were made using Chi2 or Fisher's exact tests to assess the association of the respondents' characteristics (age, gender, clinical experience, continuing education in cariology) with the management decisions. The results were compared to those obtained in 2002 and 2012 using the same questionnaire.

Results The response rate was 36,2% (n=249); 41 respondents were excluded from the analysis (specific practices, missing data).

For approximal lesions, the vast majority of the respondents (76.4%) would postpone their restorative decisions until the lesion is at the enamel-dentin junction or deeper. When comparing with the 2002 and 2012 responses, it appears that the threshold has been delayed to later stages of carious progression ($p < 0.001$). The same tendency was found for occlusal lesions with 88.4% of the respondents indicating restorative options until the lesion was in the dentin in 2023 and a delayed threshold compared to earlier results ($p < 0.001$).

Amalgam is no longer indicated neither for occlusal lesions nor for approximal (only one respondent amongst 208 for both sites). Moreover, questions related to two clinical cases show that early occlusal diagnosis is still subject to a wide variability.

Management decisions were not significantly related to respondents' characteristics, except for occlusal restorative threshold and participation to continuing education in cariology in the past five years ($p = 0.001$).

Conclusions Management concepts for both approximal and occlusal carious lesions have changed dramatically during the last 21 years for more preservative options in accordance with the concept of minimum intervention in cariology. Nevertheless, early occlusal diagnosis is still a matter of controversy.