

## Preface

# Infections, infectious diseases, and dentistry: part I



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*Guest Editor*

Infections, infectious diseases, and dentistry are at a crossroads. Our knowledge base of infectious pathogens is rapidly expanding, and our ability to detect microbial agents has never been greater. In the past 25 years, numerous new pathogens have been identified; in some cases their spread has progressed to pandemic proportions, as with HIV and hepatitis C virus. Millions of people are infected, few effective medications are available, and vaccines for both HIV and hepatitis C virus have yet to be discovered. The social impact of these two diseases is immense and will shape many countries and even continents for decades to come. The diverse epidemiology and prevention of these and many other pathogens pose a daunting challenge to public health, as well as to professions and professionals, including oral health care providers. It is therefore important to continuously update and integrate this information into our working environment.

The influence of microbes goes beyond the specific illnesses that have traditionally been associated with particular pathogens. Today, viruses found in the oral cavity are known to influence neoplastic growth and possibly contribute to conditions not normally associated with oral disease. Oral bacterial infections have been suggested as triggers for systemic conditions, such as arteriosclerosis, and bacteria lodged within biofilm may be potentially hazardous to patients' health.

Other intriguing causes of disease may not be pathogens at all, but proteins with pathogenic potential. Such proteins, or prions, have been implicated for causing life-threatening illnesses with no effective therapy.

This issue of the *Dental Clinics of North America* explores commonly encountered pathogens, pathogens of concern to dental care providers, and the possible association between pathogens and systemic disease. The different topics in this issue were selected based on their importance to the health of patients, as well as their relevance to oral health care delivery.

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