

Editorial

Don't confuse me. Consistency, please!

A horrible example of lack of consistency in terminology recently appeared in a major dental journal. Who is to blame when a paper describes one material by seven different names? Well, the authors most certainly are at fault. And since the study was funded by a manufacturer, the company people responsible for reviewing the article can be faulted—unless, of course, they want confusion around the definition of their material, which is not as unlikely as it may sound.

The paper in question described the clinical performance of one particular material. If a manufacturer and several authors cannot agree on what to call a material, how can a clinician accurately evaluate when the material should be used, where it should be used, and how it will perform?

When functioning as an author, or a reviewer, we have a responsibility to readers to elucidate rather than confuse. McLean, Nicholson, and Wilson¹ recently suggested an excellent nomenclature system for the admittedly very confusing group of materials that are neither pure glass-ionomer cements nor resin composites, but contain elements of both groups. Despite using one of the terms suggested by McLean et al, "resin-modified glass ionomer," in the title of the paper, the authors of the paper in question proceed to use the terms "compomer" and "light-activated glass ionomer restorative" in the abstract; "hybrid compomer," "resin-modified glass ionomer," "compomer," "light-activated glass ionomer restorative," "visible light-cured compomer restorative," and "glass ionomer" in the body of the paper; and "compomer," "light-activated glass ionomer restorative," and "glass ionomer-resin hybrid" in the conclusion! McLean et al have attempted to bring some clarification to the world of new materials—the paper in question has set us back.

Please—manufacturers, authors, and reviewers—don't infer that materials that are clearly not glass-ionomer materials are glass-ionomer materials, or closely related to glass-ionomer materials. Please, don't call one material a "resin-modified glass ionomer" in the title of a paper, a "compomer" in the abstract, a "hybrid compomer" in the body text, and a "glass ionomer-resin hybrid" in the final, important sentence of the conclusion! If the material in question

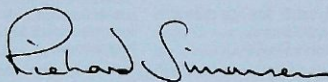
comes from an unknown category, say so. But don't use half a dozen terms for the same material in the same paper.

In their paper, the authors refer frequently to "compomers" (plural), yet at this time I believe there is only one material (not the one in this paper but interestingly from the same manufacturer) that just this one manufacturer calls a compomer—and even in this case, bets are being hedged by the manufacturer, which recently added McLean et al's "polyacid-modified composite resin" descriptor to this material.

I believe many, if not most, knowledgeable and independent colleagues (I sit in a glass house so I exclude myself from these categories) would hesitate to call the material used in this study a glass ionomer, as the manufacturer does, or any of the terms the authors used. Since the material in question does not exhibit the classic acid-base reaction of glass-ionomer materials, it would more properly be classified, according to McLean et al, as a polyacid-modified glass-ionomer material. Unfortunately, this was the one term the authors did not use.

I urge authors, reviewers, editors, and manufacturers to minimize confusion in our dental marketplace by following the excellent suggestions of McLean et al in classifying the glass-ionomer "wanna-be" materials accurately and sensibly.

Consistency, please!



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Editor-in-Chief

References:

1. McLean JW, Nicholson JW, Wilson AD. Proposed nomenclature for glass-ionomer dental cements and related materials [guest editorial]. *Quintessence Int* 1994;25:587-589.