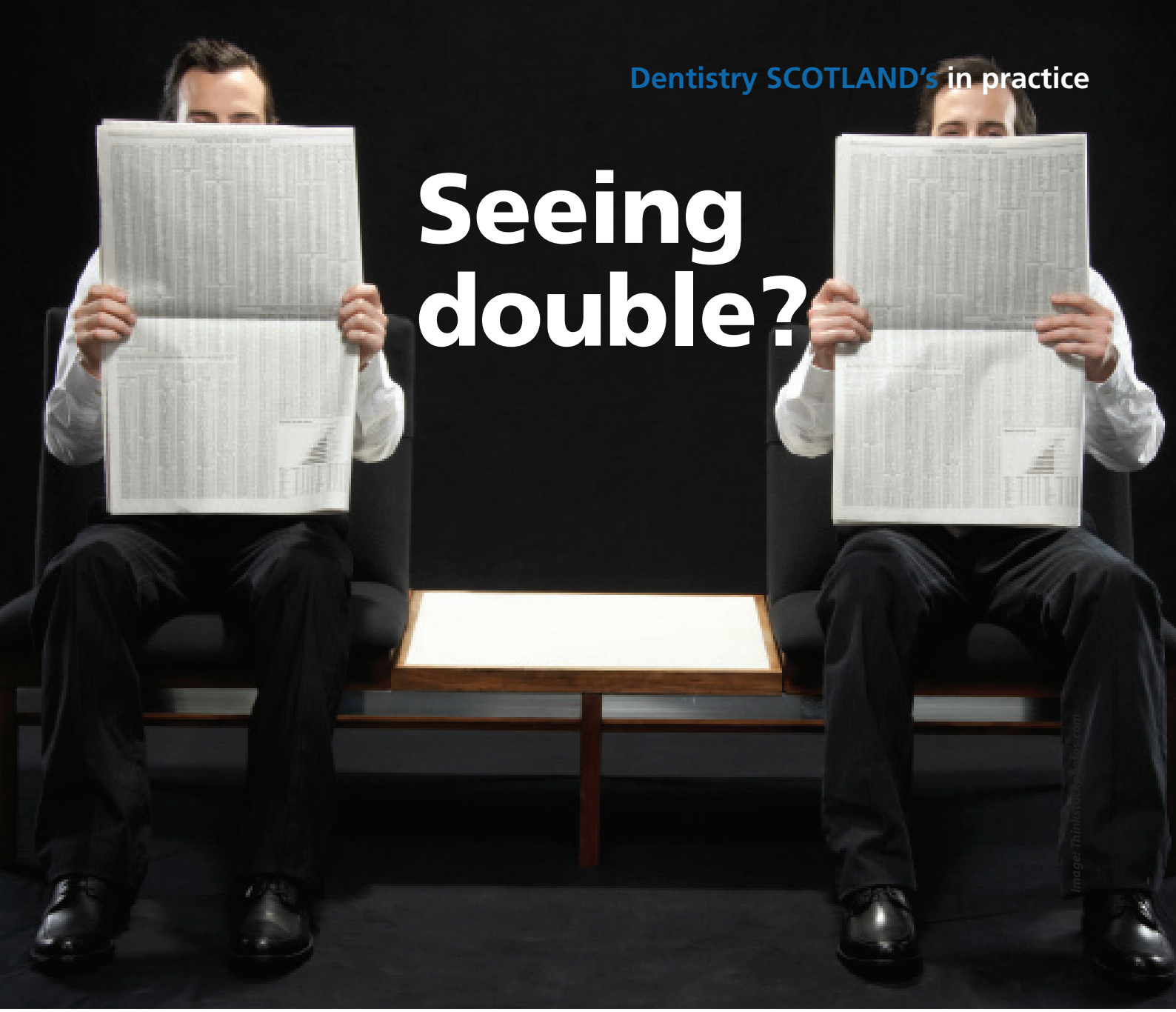

Seeing double?

Susan Hope offers a glossary of terms to ensure you're not duplicating your spending on service items

At Medicert, we often spend time explaining the differences between service items for decontamination equipment. It's important to be sure you are receiving the services you need and ask for as there is the potential to overspend if service items are duplicated due to confusion about the different terminology used by different providers. The difference between maintenance and test/inspection work is one of the more common areas of misunderstanding.

To help you decide if you are duplicating work or perhaps not having the correct work done, here is a list of commonly used terms, what these mean to most people and where confusion can occur…

Service

As strange as it may seem, this simple word gets used in a variety of ways and does lead to confusion. There really are only two meanings relevant to decontamination equipment:

- To service, meaning to carry out preventative maintenance work, eg, you have your car serviced to help reduce breakdowns and extend working life
- Service(s), meaning act(s) of assistance or advice, eg, (using the car analogy again) towing, valet, repairs, engine remapping, etc.

Maintenance

Ok, I know this seems too simplistic to mention as we all know maintenance means service and repairs (not testing or inspection) but some confusion can arise when different terms are used in contracts or guidance document.

PPM is short for planned preventative maintenance (also known as servicing) that is carried out as a matter of routine to help keep the equipment running well. RM (also known as repairs) is short for reactive maintenance.

Tip: there is one other maintenance term; user maintenance. It's really so easy to do, mostly just a bit of cleaning and it does help in keeping equipment

"It is essential that you ask your service provider or your equipment manufacturer for confirmation if you have any queries on compliancy."

running well and may be a requirement of your maintenance contract or warranty conditions.

Calibration checks

When is 134ºC really 134ºC? When it is confirmed with calibrated instruments. Let's use autoclaves as an example. Within your autoclave you have sensors for temperature and pressure. There may be multiple sensors for temperature. These all have to read the temperature accurately and agree with each other. To check this, a UKAS traceable, calibrated instrument is used by the engineer to see if it agrees with the autoclave sensors. If the sensors are mistaken, the autoclave then needs to be recalibrated.

Here's something you may not know: depending on the model, just because the printer on your autoclave says that the right temperature has been achieved it is possible that the sensor is out of calibration and it may not be true. It is essential therefore to ensure that the autoclave has regular calibration checks. This is usually done and documented during the course of a service.

Certification

This is virtually meaningless without proper context. It means issuing a certificate of course, but for what? Most often this refers to the documentation accompanying statutory Inspections of equipment, such as pressure vessel inspections.

Pressure vessel inspection (PVI)

Commonly referred to as certification, pressure testing, pressure system inspection, insurance inspection, etc. Without question, PVIs gives rise to more confusion than just about anything else (apart from matters relating to radiation). This is a statutory requirement. It is not maintenance.

In the case of autoclaves, it does not concern itself with effective sterilisation. It is about the safety of the user and others near it. It plays a similar role to a car MOT. Just because a car passes an MOT one day it does not mean that it will not break down the following day when the fuel injectors clog up due to lack of servicing. The point of the MOT is safety not function. The same thing applies to a PVI. Without a valid PVI, it is not lawful for an employer to use the equipment in question.

Tip one: lots of service providers now offer PVIs.

Tip two: the regulations that require PVIs also require that adequate and appropriate maintenance is carried out.

Written scheme of examination

This is associated with PVIs. It is essentially a list of written instructions to the engineer carrying out the PVI; listing what they must check or test.

Installation, commissioning and validation

I've put these together as they are often seen together. Of course, different models have different requirements but to keep things simple these are broad explanations:

- Installation: to unpack the equipment, place it where it will be used and connect to any services (sorry, there's another use for the word services; air, water, electricity). Equipment may also need to be set up in a similar way to a new computer; inputting data such as the location and user names, setting up data loggers, resetting pressure transducers, etc. Installation is carried out as per the manufacturer's requirements and will most often include user training
- Commissioning: carrying out manufacturer required or recommended checks or tests of the equipment
- Validation: this is a series of in-depth tests using calibrated instruments to ensure that the equipment is doing what it is supposed to do. In sterilisers this is about sterilisation parameters while in washer disinfectors it's about how well they clean and confirming disinfection parameters. This is a simplistic explanation but it gets to the heart of the matter.

Revalidation

This can also be referred to as annual testing or qualification. It is essentially the same as validation, but its purpose is to check that the equipment is still achieving the results it did at first validation. Unlike PVIs, this is all about how well the equipment is doing its job. Like PVIs, it is not maintenance.

Quarterly testing

This is not the same as quarterly servicing. Quarterly tests are rather like mini revalidations; a series of tests similar to revalidation but less in-depth. Although these are included, along with revalidation, in SHTM 2010 and SHTM 2030, some manufacturers of modern decontamination equipment recommend annual revalidation and PPM at appropriate intervals.

By necessity, the content of this article is simplistic and general and should not be considered to be a comprehensive guide to health and safety regulation or decontamination guideline compliancy. It aims to provide an idea of the difference between these services but does not provide detail on the requirements for your specific situation. It is essential that you ask your service provider or your equipment manufacturer for confirmation if you have any queries on compliancy.

Medicert
was founded in Falkirk in 2001 to provide equipment services specifically to practices in Scotland. The company has helped hundreds of practices since then and continues to respond to the needs of its expanding client base every day.