On Oct. 8 and 9, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave two new clearances for lasers in dentistry. Biolase Technology Inc.’s Millennium received marketing approval for Class I, II and V cavity preparation, caries removal and etching. Premier Laser Systems Inc.’s Centauri erbium:yttrium-aluminum-garnet laser was cleared for certain pediatric applications: cavity preparation, caries removal and etching.

When readers were asked if they were interested in acquiring laser technology for their offices, 57 percent of respondents to December’s Question of the Month said “no,” 32 percent said “yes,” and 11 percent said they were undecided. JADA asked readers a similar question in June 1997 after Premier’s Centauri Er:YAG laser was cleared by the FDA for caries removal, cavity preparation and limited hard-tissue procedures in patients 18 years of age and older. At that time, 66 percent of readers said they were not interested in introducing a dental laser system to their practices, 30 percent said they were, and 5 percent said maybe someday but not now.

While the percentage of readers interested in introducing laser technology to their practices has increased, their reasons both for and against have remained pretty much the same.

In June 1997, most respondents cited the $39,000 price tag as a major concern. Some felt the cost was prohibitive. Others felt that the laser would be a good investment when its number of applications increased.

A majority of readers who answered “no” to December’s Question of the Month concurred, saying that the lasers’ cost and limited use are why they are not interested in acquiring dental lasers.

“Unless the laser can perform all of the procedures my handpiece can, I will not purchase a very expensive, ‘part-time’ handpiece,” said one respondent.

Some readers said they want to wait until lasers are developed for more applications or to see how they work in the long term. One said he sees lasers as being “a cause in search of a disease.”

The lasers’ cost and versatility also were issues among several readers who said they are interested in acquiring one in the future. “I’m just waiting for prices to drop and features to improve,” said one reader. “Hopefully the next five years will see these happen.”

Other readers are looking forward to providing this new technology to their patients. “I am excited to soon be able to offer patients a new modality of treatment that removes the dread and fear associated with the drill,” said a respondent. “Also, my ears will enjoy the lack of noise!”

Readers who said they were undecided listed expense and lack of long-term studies on pulp vitality and microfractures as reasons why. “I won’t get a laser until there is a long and successful track record established in a clinical situation and after the price has been moderated by the competition,” said one.

JADA’s Question of the Month is presented as an opportunity for JADA readers to express their views on the issues of the day, for the interest of their colleagues in dentistry. The Question of the Month does not qualify as a scientific survey, and its findings should not be construed as statistically significant.