

Oral Cancer: One of the ONLY Cancers that is still growing ...

Did this shock you as much as it shocked me? This unfortunate fact is not surprising when you understand the reasons why. With April approaching, and being "Oral Cancer Month," I wanted to discuss this type of cancer and some promising technology that will hopefully change these alarming statistics. Traditionally, oral cancer had very "obvious" risk factors in patients. I was taught in dental school that almost all oral cancers were found

in people who smoke, chew tobacco, drink excessive alcohol, or had previous history of cancer. Contributing to the increase in oral cancers is the sexually transmitted human papilloma virus (HPV), the fastest growing cause of oral cancer. But the truth is, up to 40 percent of oral cancers occur in patients without any use of alcohol, tobacco, or any other significant lifestyle risk. This is something that not only the public needs to be aware of, but also dentists in

today's world.

Possible Risk Factors for Oral Cancer:

- Previous history of cancer
- Smoking cigarettes, cigars, pipes
- Chewing tobacco use
- Drinking alcohol
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Drinking alcohol in conjunction with tobacco use greatly increases your oral cancer risk

Cancer is now the leading cause of death worldwide, resulting in about 7.4 million deaths. Cancer has become so common that 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women will develop cancer in their lifetime. The good news is that survival rates have increased for almost all cancers. The bad news is that oral cancer is NOT one of them. In fact, oral cancer is 3.5 times more prevalent than cervical cancer in the U.S. Early detection with better screening methods for certain cancers has greatly improved survival rates for patients. In addition, increased public awareness has really helped with identifying cancers and treating them properly.

What if oral cancer is caught early?

If oral cancer is caught in Stage I or 2, it has an 83 percent survival rate at 5 years. Unfortunately, the biggest problem is that most oral cancers are found in Stages 3 and 4, which significantly decreases the success rate for treatment (down to 36 percent). In our office, we have always done a thorough head and neck cancer screening during every dental cleaning. This includes examining the tongue, cheeks, roof of the mouth, all surrounding gum tissues, and checking the neck for swollen lymph nodes (these can be a warning sign of infection or disease). If something was found that was "suspicious," we have patients return in 2 weeks for a re-evaluation of the area. If the area was still present in 2 weeks, we would make a referral to our local oral surgeon for them to evaluate it further. Oral surgeons are specifically trained in oral diseases and, if necessary, will order further tests or biopsy the area.

Possible Signs of Oral Cancer:

- White lesions (especially on only one side of the mouth)
- Red lesions (especially on only one side of the mouth)
- Lump in the mouth or neck
- Soreness in throat or difficulty swallowing

All of the above symptoms should resolve themselves in 2 weeks or a proper referral to a specialist should be made

How do we catch it early?

We want to continue to screen early and screen annually. The Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) recommends a thorough oral cancer screening starting at 17 years old. In addition to our traditional head and neck exam, there are promising technologies utilizing fluorescence to provide more data than the naked eye. There are a few different techniques and devices that use this technology. Our



Dentally Speaking
by
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office has adopted Oral ID™ to aid us in our efforts to catch oral cancer or dysplasia (pre-cancer) early. By shining a special light on tissue, it causes it to emit fluorescence which indicates that it is healthy. Abnormal or suspicious tissue will have a lack of fluorescence and appear dark when the light shines on it.

If we detect an area that is appearing dark, in conjunction with our findings during the oral cancer exam, we will have the patient return to our office in 2 weeks to reevaluate the area. This adoption of technology in dental screenings is similar to other medical screenings, like breast and cervical cancer, where technology has greatly improved early detection.

Free Oral Cancer Screenings in April

The statistics for oral cancer survival rates and its increasing prevalence was eye-opening for me. The more people that are aware of the seriousness of this disease and ways to identify it early will be instrumental in improving these tragic figures. Dentists are the first line of defense in fighting oral cancer and we are very hopeful that Oral ID™, which provides helpful data adding to current oral cancer checks, will help catch oral cancer early and also educate our patients about the risk factors for oral cancer. **We would like to offer a free oral cancer exam for anyone who calls our office in the month of April. Please call our office at 248-656-2020 for your free oral cancer exam.**

Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S. of Doolin & Haddad Advanced Dentistry completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ disorders and practice management.

For more information, visit www.rochesteradvanced-dentistry.com.

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