



Oral Cancer Awareness

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Oral cavity cancer is amongst the most prevalent cancers worldwide affecting men more than women. It is associated with significant morbidity and low post treatment survival. Oral cancer can develop in any part of the oral cavity but most of the time it begins in the flat cells covering the surfaces tongue, lips and cheeks.

Several factors that may contribute to the development of oral cancer have been identified by the researchers. Traditionally, heavy alcohol users and smokers older than 50-year of age were considered at high risk of developing the cancer but today it occurs more often in younger, non-smoking persons having history of a virus known as HPV16. This virus is a sexually transmitted virus found associated with cancer of the cervix in females and is related to the growing incidence of Oropharyngeal malignancies. The lesion most commonly occurs in the tonsils or the base of the tongue of a sufferer. Frequent sun exposure is also a risk factor for lip cancer. Its symptoms are alarming which include white or red patches on inner surface of cheeks, sore throat, a non-healing mouth sore, unnecessarily loosened teeth, pain in jaws and ears of unknown origin, problems felt in deglutition, lump in the neck and striking weight loss.

Treatment of oral cancer includes surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy and in most of the cases patients have to undergo combination of cancer therapies. Patients treated with advanced oral malignancy may likely require reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation to help in eating and speaking during the recovery phase. It is not only very costly but post treatment survival is also not encouraging. In United States alone, each hour throughout a calendar year, an individual dies of oral cancer because of ignorance, lack of awareness and delayed intervention.

Many studies have acknowledged the benefits of timely diagnosis and population screening programs in the appropriate management of the devastating malady. It has been anticipated that

approximately 25% of the deaths due to cancer may be reduced by early detection and essential intervention. World Health Organization, in 2005 passed a resolution on cancer prevention which urges to develop and strengthen cancer control programs, prioritizing preventable cancers and their risk factors intervention.

Public awareness against the deadly disease needs to be emphasized as today; some cancers that were once considered fatal have become treatable. The advancements in understanding risk factors, along with prevention, diagnosis and provision of prompt therapy have enhanced cancer management. Educating patients to follow a healthy lifestyle is mandatory to prevent the disease. Dentists can play a vital role in this regard. Necessary amendments in the outcome of the dental degree courses should be made internationally to enable dental graduates to educate their patients to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Some of the healthy lifestyle advice dentists may emphasize and monitor routinely include cessation of tobacco use, reducing alcohol consumption, eating a healthy diet as patients visit quietly frequently to their dentists.

For awareness of various cancers, campaigns are launched globally by various professional organizations. In England and Wales respiratory symptoms awareness, Lung cancer awareness and abdominal symptoms campaigns are effectively functioning for variable period of time. Breast Cancer Awareness campaign is launched worldwide to highlight the significance of breast cancer awareness, education and research. The activity is observed through the month of October.

Oral Cancer Foundation (OCF) is a USA based non-profit organization which every year observes April as a month of Oral Cancer Awareness. OCF has put some successful effort to increase the public's awareness about the killing disease but it is highly astonishing that for decades there has been little or no improvement in the

statistics and figures which reckon its deadly survival. The most striking reason behind the failure is that no one has come forward to own the humanitarian cause. Dental practitioners and Oral Surgeons in USA who have the ability to decrease the morbidity and mortality due to oral cancers have not involved themselves sufficiently in the efforts to defeat the ailment.

Oral cancer is not restricted within USA. Several countries in Europe like Germany has a considerable increase in prevalence of Oral Cancer and research has shown a distressing lack of awareness about the disease causes and its symptoms and these gaps in knowledge need to be addressed by public awareness through education. As it is world widely spread disease with rising incidence, there is dire need that dental fraternity participates wholeheartedly in ventures like OCF and observe whole the month of April as oral cancer awareness month all over the globe. Dental and other health related professional organizations should also actively play a part to promote this noble cause.

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