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DTI
LEIPZIG, Germany: New evidence from Australia has revealed that the long-term use of mouthwash containing alcohol can lead to an increased risk of developing oral cancer. The information, which was released after a scientific review was published in the Australian Dental Journal, reports on evidence that ethanol allows carcinogenic substances, such as nicotine, to permeate the lining of the mouth. Top-selling mouthwashes contain as much as 26 per cent alcohol, which is used to kill the bacteria responsible for tooth decay. It is also necessary as a solvent for different flavour oils.

Michael McCullough, Associate Professor of Oral Medicine at the University of Melbourne in Australia, who led the study said: “We see people with oral cancer who have no other risk factors than the use of mouthwash containing alcohol, so what we’ve done is review all the evidence. Since the article, further evidence has come out, too.”

“We believe there should be warnings. If it was a facial cream that had the effect of reducing acne but had a four to five-fold increased risk of skin cancer, no-one would be recommending it,” he added.

The Australian government said although the study was “very interesting”, it lacked definite proof that these products would increase the risk of cancer. Ministry of Health dental officer, Robin Whyman, recommended people speak to their dentists when using mouthwash long term.

In a written statement sent to Dental Tribune in January, Johnson & Johnson rejected the claims: “Leading cancer scientists, as well as the US Food and Drug Administration and researchers in dentistry, have found no evidence that alcohol-containing mouthwashes, if used properly, lead to increased risk of developing oral cancer.” The company, which is behind the Listerine brand, holds 25 per cent of the global mouthwash market and claims to have conducted more than 100 scientific evaluations of its top-selling brand.