A new test for gum disease

Ahmed Khocht, DDS, an associate professor of periodontology at Temple University’s Maurice H. Kornberg School of Dentistry, led a team that studied the efficacy of a colored strip to detect gum disease by changing color in response to the levels of microbial sulfur compounds found in saliva. The strip changes from white to yellow, and the darker the shade of yellow the more severe the gum disease.

Khocht and his team looked at 75 patients divided into three groups — those with gingivitis, those with periodontitis and those that were healthy. A color chart formed the basis of scoring for the changes in the color strip, and were compared to scores for traditional assessments such as attachment levels, bleeding on probing, gingival index and plaque index. Using a color strip would be quicker and easier than using those traditional assessment methods, and would cause no pain to the patient.

Given that 80 percent of adults have some form of periodontal or gum disease, a quick and painless method to identify the diseases would save the dental practice time and money as well. A growing body of research supports the links between gum disease to blood infection, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, low birth-weight babies and obesity.

Thus, early detection of periodontal or gum disease is paramount to a patient’s overall health.

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