Medical experts are urging dentists and physicians to work closer together in a bid to improve understanding of patient health.

The news follows the latest clinical evidence from a new report which examines the association between periodontitis and systemic conditions.

A UK group of cardiology, endocrinology and periodontology experts found a potential link between periodontitis and an increased likelihood of CVD.

They also discovered that periodontitis is also of more severe in subjects with diabetes mellitus - a group already at increased risk for cardiovascular events.

The potential impact of periodontal disease on general health represents the first time a broad group of UK experts has convened to explore the growing body of research into this important area.

On reading the report Dr Tony Jenner, deputy chief dental officer for England said: The Department of Health (DoH) launched Delivering Better Oral Health—a evidence based tool kit for prevention in September 2007. This document intends for use throughout dental care services aims to provide practical evidence-based guidance to help promote oral health and prevent oral disease.

We welcome this new report and it reinforces the current drive for greater emphasis on prevention of ill-health and reduction of inequalities of health by the giving of advice and application of evidence-informed actions.

It is important that the whole dental team, as well as other health care workers, give consistent messages and that those messages are up to date and correct. This literature review does however identify a lack of prospective studies at this point in time linking periodontal disease with CVD and until such studies have taken place we should be cautious in attributing a causal effect.

Dr Ray Williams, a USA periodontist at the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry and lead author of the report, said: The promotion of good oral health, as part of better overall health care should be seen as a natural extension of current healthy lifestyle messages around diet, exercise and the cessation of smoking, which are designed to help reduce the burden of CVD and diabetes.

Periodontitis has attracted much interest as a potential risk factor not only for cardiovascular disease (CVD) and diabetes, but also for its association with adverse pregnancy outcomes, respiratory disease, kidney disease and certain cancers.

The interaction of oral health and general health has been recognised in the dental profession for a long time, but doctors especially those in general practice do not recognise the link.

This could change with a recent expert report published in Current Medical Research and Opinion, which examined the potential link between oral hygiene, associated gum disease and other systemic diseases involving inflammatory processes such as CVD and diabetes.

The authors conclude that both doctors and dentists are encouraged in the report to educate patients on the importance of maintaining a healthy mouth for the sake of their general health.

The infectious and inflammatory burden of chronic periodontitis is believed to have an important systemic impact on overall health. The exact reasons are unknown, but may be the result of oral bacteria entering the bloodstream and/or the systemic inflammatory reaction produced in response to the oral bacteria.

The idea that oral infection and inflammation within the mouth can reach distant sites and organs in the body, or the ‘focal infection theory’, was a popular concept in the 1920s but interest waned.

Compelling reports from Finland in 1989 linked CVD and periodontitis, and there has been a major effort to elucidate the relationship of oral health to general health. The emerging position of periodontal disease in cardiovascular and metabolic disease research has been recognised by the World Heart Federation and by the American Diabetes Association congress committees as a topic for inclusion within recent and forthcoming international congress programmes.