**Mouth cancer ignorance continues**

A facial surgery research charity has announced that survey results that some dental practice staff are still not adequately informed about the signs of mouth cancer, thereby ‘delaying treatment and resulting in invasive and disfiguring surgery for thousands.’

ProF Hutchinson added: ‘Much more needs to be done to train receptionists, because they are the 1st line of the treatment team. The longer a patient has to wait for an appointment, the more difficult the condition is to treat.’

The FSRF has been leading a campaign to increase public awareness of mouth cancer along with key risk factors such as smoking. The charity conducts clinical research to improve the treatment of cancer of the head and neck, facial injury and deformity and also runs tobacco and alcohol educational intervention programmes for more than 8,000 children.

In the United Kingdom alone 4,700 people develop oral cancer every year and 1,700 people die from this specific type of cancer. Saving Faces researchers are currently working on a study funded by Cancer Research UK, the first large scale surgical clinical trial in the UK for patients with oral cancer. The trial involves more than 600 patients nationwide and aims to answer important questions about the treatment of patients with oral cancer to benefit both patients and the NHS.

Dr Nigel Carter, CEO of the British Dental Health Foundation (BDHF) which is spearheading the awareness campaign, said: ‘We are very disappointed with the survey results. Mouth cancer kills one person every five hours in the UK and it is vital that the entire practice team plus pharmacists can recognise symptoms so patients can be screened quickly, because early detection of mouth cancer raises survival chances to more than 90 per cent.

The BDHF urges dental practices to take action by training team members, support staff and receptionists to spot warning signs, screening patients for mouth cancer at every visit and discussing the issues and warning signs with patients.

But Derek Watson, CEO of the Dental Practitioners Association commented, ‘Oral cancer is difficult to diagnose, particularly in the early stages, even for dentists. This was highlighted by the recent case of Dr Nalin Dhamecha who was advised by the GDC to retrain on recognising oral cancer, after he failed to recognise a lesion from which the patient later died. Urgent appointments are usually all referred by receptionists for patients in pain and most cancers are painless in the early stages. Receptionists could be asked to add “painless ulcer which are not healing” to their list of emergency conditions, but expect them to recognise mouth cancer from a telephone description is really disguised frustration at the time it takes to see a dentist. I think that reducing non-attendance rates and delay by patients in seeking advice – especially drinkers and smokers – and setting up fast-track referrals into secondary care, are higher priorities than blaming overworked receptionists.’

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**Ethics conference**

A conference on Legal, Ethical and Clinical Issues in Dentistry, is taking place in London. The event, on October 9th at Woburn House, is organised by the patient safety charity Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA), and is run in association with the General Dental Council. The conference will examine the impact on den- tists and patients of recent reforms and will also tackle the medicolegal issues facing dentistry. In addition, it will look at how to improve patient safety and learn from mistakes to ensure a safer workplace. For more details, email: conferences@avma.org.uk