If in doubt, get checked out

Dental Tribune’s Laura Hatton sets the scene for Mouth Cancer Action Month in November

As the front page shows, this November Mouth Cancer Action Month officially began at the Houses of Parliament and was hosted by the British Dental Health Foundation (BDHF). Along with the Mouth Cancer Foundation, the campaign will be raising awareness of mouth cancer. The BDHF will be promoting the campaign and tagline ‘If in doubt, get checked out’ to raise awareness of the disease.

Currently in the UK, mouth cancer kills one person every five hours, and less than half of those diagnosed with the disease survive beyond five years of diagnosis.

Recent studies have shown that drinking, smoking, and unhealthy diets have doubled mouth, throat and food pipe cancer cases in young people. Furthermore, links between oral sex and mouth cancer have recently been discovered.

These worrying figures show that action needs to be taken.

So far the Mouth Cancer Foundation has organised its annual sponsored Mouth Cancer 10KM Awareness Walk and throughout November wristbands, t-shirts and posters will be available to help promote Action Month, all of which sport the blue logo.

Denplan are also taking part in Mouth Cancer Action Month and in a bid to ensure that the campaign receives maximum exposure they are distributing approximately 50,000 MCAM posters to dentists, doctors, hospitals, PCTs and many other health professionals across the UK. Encouraging people to visit their dentist or GP to check any areas of concern in the mouth, the posters highlight the key facts and risks associated with mouth cancer.

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Awareness
Stepping into reality, the high profile case of Michael Douglas has recently brought oral cancer out of the shadows and into the news and health experts are hoping that the public will start opening their eyes to the existence of mouth cancer – too many people are simply convinced it could never happen to them.

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Early diagnosis saves lives, the BDHF is encouraging people to take part in the Blue Ribbon Badge Appeal to raise both funds and awareness of mouth cancer.

How your practice can help
Throughout Action Month dentists can play a vital role in saving lives by providing routine screenings for mouth cancer and to educate themselves on the symptoms of mouth cancer so they can inform their patients and help save lives. Denplan has provided a template which practices can send to the press so they can advertise that they are offering free screenings. The template is available at www.denplan.co.uk.

Dentists can also take part in the Blue Ribbon Badge Appeal to circulate awareness. Once they have registered they will be posted a kit which includes:

- One collection box
- 25 X enamel blue ribbon lapel
badges.

• An official Mouth Cancer Action Month poster for your waiting room
• Full set of instructions.

The badges can either be sold to raise money or they can be given away to help raise awareness: Either way, the badges play a central role in the campaign - sparking questions and debates and most importantly, awareness.

Dental practices can help raise funds for the Dental Protection Legion (DPL) to coincide with MCAM and promote the BDHF's tagline ‘If in doubt, get checked out.’ The programme, ‘Oral Cancer – Prevention. Examination. Referral’, aims to raise awareness of oral cancer and to most importantly, increase screening.

In effect, it restores the component of reality and understanding and provides interactive learning and video diaries. One video retells the story of Ralph Goodson, who survived oral cancer; the happy ending is a definite mean to ensure that early detection does save lives.

The 90 minute programme, which was advised by Fiona Clarke, the in-house advisor, and Prof. Scully and Prof. Saman Warmakulsurya, is interactive with videos and animations and aims to offer an extensive oral cancer learning resource for healthcare professionals. The programme is divided into 4 topics; The Facts, Team Approach, Examination Procedure and Case Studies. There are sections on communication techniques - discussing cancer prevention with patients, demonstrative videos to carrying out an oral mucosa examination, clinical images and information on the signs of potential cancer, animations on cancer development.

Alongside the many fundraising events and the Blue Ribbon Badge Appeal, the public are also being encouraged to play their part through self-examination; using the hands of healthcare professionals.

There is VELscope®, a hand-held device, which was developed in collaboration with the British Columbia Cancer Agency and MD Anderson Cancer Center. It is based on the direct visualization of tissue fluorescence and the changes in fluorescence that occur when abnormalities are present. The clinician is then able to immediately view the different fluorescence responses to help differentiate between normal and abnormal tissue.

There is also ViziLite Plus with TBlue, which is an oral lesion identification and marking system that is used as an adjunct to the conventional head and neck examination. It is comprised of a chemiluminescent light source (ViziLite) to improve the identification of lesions and a blue phenothiazine dye to mark those lesions identified by ViziLite oral cancer.

Screening technology

With the race to beat mouth cancer on, new technology is emerging onto the medical scene and into the hands of healthcare professionals.

See what you are missing...