‘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.

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.

“Many people have not heard of mouth cancer, and do not realise how common it is – latest figures show that over 5,300 cases are diagnosed in the UK in a year.”

Another worrying fact that came out of the study was that 40 per cent of the people who took part in the study decided to self-manage their symptoms.

Dr Carter said: “Public awareness of oral cancer and the associated risk factors appears to be too low here in the UK. An awareness of the risk factors and symptom recognition by the public is a critical issue in determining survival rates, as early detection greatly improves the chances of survival.

To boost this information that 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.

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The Mouth Cancer Action Month poster will be put up in dental practices across the UK and promotes 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 means 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 Warnaalasuraya, 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 carry on 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.

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 TiBlue, 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.

Regular professional check-ups and self-examinations are the best route to early detection of mouth cancer. If it’s diagnosed within the early stages, survival chances improve to more than 90 per cent. With this statistic in mind, there has never been a more important time for practice teams to support Mouth Cancer Action Month.

A reason to smile

Sometimes the facts and figures of oral cancer can overshadow the human element of cancer and the reality of the disease can be lost under numbers, percentages, medical terms and possible outcomes, all of which are far from an understandable reality. In response to these issues, Smile-on has teamed up with BDHF, KSS Deane and the Dental Protection Legion (DPL) to coincide with MCAM