LONDON, UK: Lifestyle habits like smoking, drinking alcohol or an unbalanced diet, in addition to human papillomavirus infections, appear to have resulted in a surge of oral cancer in the UK. New data released by Cancer Research UK in London on the occasion of Mouth Cancer Action Month in November, show that the incidence of the disease has increased significantly throughout the population over the last 20 years.

Cases have almost doubled since the late 1990s, from eight to 13 cases per 100,000 people.

The highest increase was observed in women, among whom the incidence of oral cancer has soared through all age groups in the last two decades by a staggering 71 per cent. In comparison, the incidence rate of breast cancer, the most common cancer in British women, increased by 10 to 20 per cent in the same period. Oral cancer is almost seven times as high in women over 50, in whom the organisation reported 2,200 cases in 2015, compared with 300 cases in women under 50.

A similar situation was found among men. Oral cancer rates climbed by 34 per cent to 4,400 reported cases in men under 50 and by 67 per cent to 640 reported cases in men over 50.

Men currently account for two-thirds of all reported oral cancer cases in the UK.

“It’s worrying that oral cancer has become more common,” said Jessica Kirby, Cancer Research UK’s Senior Health Information Manager. “Healthy lifestyles can help reduce the risk of developing the disease in the first place. Not smoking, drinking less alcohol and eating plenty of fruit and vegetables can all help to cut our risk of mouth cancer.”

In view of the figures, Cancer Research UK has now called on local councillors and the public to help protect vital Stop Smoking services, which are under threat owing to budget cuts. It has also developed an oral cancer toolkit in cooperation with the British Dental Association (BDA) to help general medical practitioners, dentists, nurses and hygienists spot early signs of the disease and refer suspected cases sooner.

According to research, survival rates can be improved significantly if the disease is identified early.

“Early detection is key, and a check-up can mean the difference between a 90 and 50 per cent survival rate,” commented Dr Russ Ladwa, Chair of the Health and Science Committee at the BDA.

Smoking has been identified as the greatest avoidable risk factor for oral cancer, linked to an estimated 65 per cent of cases, in addition to drinking alcohol and following a diet low in fruit and vegetables. A recent study conducted by University of Derby researchers also confirmed a link between these lifestyle choices and a higher risk of developing head and neck cancer from human papillomavirus infections.

Prescriptions of antibiotics decrease

LONDON, UK: In line with general medical practices and hospitals, dental practices in the UK for the first time prescribed fewer antibiotics last year. According to a new report issued by Public Health England (PHE) as part of the English surveillance programme for antimicrobial utilisation and resistance (ESPAUR), dentists gave out approximately 7 per cent less of the two most prescribed antibiotics, amoxicillin and metronidazole, in 2015 than in 2014.

Across all health sectors, 2.2 million fewer antibiotic prescriptions were dispensed in the community last year. The overall consumption of antibiotics in 2015 was 21.8 defined daily dose per 1,000 inhabitants per day, a 4.3 per cent decrease from the 22.9 DDD recorded by PHE in the previous year, the report states.

Dentists are currently responsible for 5 per cent of antibiotic prescriptions, with the overall majority given out by general medical practitioners and hospitals.

The figures are relevant in view of the roll out of a new dental toolkit developed by the dental subgroup of ESPAUR in collaboration with the Faculty of General Dental Practice (FGDP) and the British Dental Association (BDA). It includes an easy self-audit tool and patient-facing posters and leaflets to support effective antimicrobial stewardship in dentistry.

“Dentists have a vital role to play in keeping antibiotics working. Audit helps us fulfil our professional responsibility only to prescribe antibiotics when it is appropriate to do so, and the new tool is an easy way to measure our practice against clinical guidance, and identify, implement and sustain any changes we need to put in place,” FGDP Dean Dr Mick Horton said.

Dentists are able to download the free toolkit from both the BDA and FGDP websites.

Despite the drop in prescriptions, resistance to antibiotics is still a problem. The government has vowed to reduce inappropriate prescribing by 50 per cent by 2020 to tackle the problem.

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