Periodontitis: Faster cognitive decline in people with Alzheimer’s

By DTI

LONDON & SOUTHAMPTON, UK: A number of studies have demonstrated that poor oral hygiene, a common problem among elderly patients, is a risk factor for developing Alzheimer's disease. Now, a joint research project led by scientists at the University of Southampton and King's College London has provided further evidence that periodontitis could be associated with increased dementia severity and a more rapid cognitive decline in Alzheimer’s patients.

Fifty-nine non-smoking patients with an average age of 77.3, mild to moderate dementia and a minimum of ten teeth who had not received treatment for periodontitis in the past six months participated in the study. The patients underwent dental examinations by a dental hygienist at baseline and at the six-month follow-up. In addition, blood samples were taken to measure inflammatory markers in their blood.

The presence of periodontal disease at baseline was associated with a sixfold increase in the rate of cognitive decline in participants over the study period. Periodontitis at baseline was also associated with a relative increase in the pro-inflammatory state over the follow-up period.

The researchers concluded that periodontal disease is associated with an increase in cognitive decline in Alzheimer’s disease, possibly via mechanisms linked to the body’s inflammatory response.

As the study only included a limited number of participants, the authors stated that the findings should be validated in a larger-cohort study. In addition, they highlighted that the precise mechanisms by which periodontitis may be linked to cognitive decline are not fully understood and other factors might also play a part in the decline seen in participants’ cognition alongside their oral health. However, the current evidence is sufficient to explore whether periodontal treatment might benefit the treatment of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, they said.

Periodontitis is a common disease in older people. The World Health Organization estimates that 15–20 per cent of adults aged 35–44 worldwide have severe periodontal disease. The condition may become more common in Alzheimer’s disease because of a reduced ability to take care of oral hygiene as the disease progresses.

Higher levels of antibodies to periodontal bacteria are associated with an increase in levels of inflammatory molecules elsewhere in the body, which in turn has been linked to greater rates of cognitive decline in Alzheimer’s disease in previous studies.

Dr Mark Iles, from King's College London Dental Institute and first author on the paper, said: "Gum disease is widespread in the UK and US, and in older age groups is thought to be a major cause of tooth loss. In the UK in 2009, around 80 per cent of adults over 55 had evidence of periodontal disease, while 40 per cent of adults aged 65–74 and 60 per cent of those older than 75 had less than 21 of their original 32 teeth, with half of them reporting periodontitis before they lost teeth."

The study, titled “Periodontitis and cognitive decline in Alzheimer’s disease”, was published online on 10 March in the *PLOS ONE* journal.
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Primespeak launches patient communication series in the UK

MANCHESTER, UK: Many dentists find it difficult to communicate the right treatment options to patients, who through false or incomplete information on the Internet present to practices with unrealistic expectations. While the majority of patient communication training programmes available today often focus on one or more fixed strategies at a time, there are other concepts that aim to make this process more natural and less stressful for the dentists. One of them is Primespeak, an import from one of Australia’s leading practice management companies, which is currently making its large-scale debut in the UK.

First introduced to the market here by Sydney-based Prime Practice three years ago, the seminar series is now on an extended road tour in the UK, stopping in cities like London, Birmingham, Bristol and Belfast, throughout the year and is made possible through a partnership with Henry Schein company Software of Excellence. The series was recently launched at a premier event in Manchester with 40 participants, where Dental Tribune had the opportunity to speak with some of the programme’s directors and trainers.

According to Prime Practice General Manager of Education and Training Patric Moberger, one of the key objectives of the programme is to help patients take responsibility for their own teeth and to understand the damaging consequences of not looking after them. In order to achieve this, the programme provides a number of tools and strategies that, when applied at the right time and in the right combination, can help dentists gain patients’ compliance with treatment, particularly those who do not truly understand the options before them.

“Primespeak is applied at its optimum for patients who think that nothing is wrong because there is no pain involved. It is quite like high cholesterol: you do not feel the consequences until it is too late,” Moberger explained. “By stepping away, we let the patient come to you ask for a solution instead of recommending something they may not understand and thus want to get involved in.”

“Normally in sales you move towards the patient with a solution. All the tools that we are using with Primespeak however are counter-intuitive to sales training. The role that the dentists and the team have here is to make the patient understand that things are going on in their mouth and that they offer the right solutions for them,” he added.

Feedback from dentists who participated in Primespeak seminars held in Australia and the US, where the series has been available to dental professionals for many years, has been very positive and encouraged the company, together with word of mouth, to bring the concept to the UK. In addition to the live seminars, it offers master classes, private consultations with a trainer and a library of online training videos. Seminars for dental assistants and front-end staff are under consideration. Participants at the seminar in Manchester responded positively to the programme.

“Participating in a Primespeak Seminar. Time very well spent,” commented a dentist from Hull.

Another participant from Glasgow said: “I cannot recommend this course enough. It will remove the pressure when interacting with patients and is key to avoiding sales pitching perception.”

Primespeak is holding its next seminar in June in Birmingham. Dentists or dental staff interested in registering for the programme can obtain more information at primespeak.com/uk.

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