Early detection of oral cancer: Duties of a dental surgeon

Nidhi Tripathi1, Sanyog Pathak2

1Dental Surgeon, Reva Dental Clinic & Facial Surgery Centre, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India, 2Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery, Hitkarini Dental College & Hospital, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

Dental surgeons are the people who examine the oral cavity most frequently. Unfortunately, due to lack of knowledge and training, structures other than teeth are missed for proper examination. A large chunk of patients is still diagnosed in late stage of cancer when prognosis is poor. For provisional diagnosis and referral, visual examination by an expert dentist is sufficient. We, being stomatologists, can make a difference if little bit time is spent and responsibility is shown from our side. As we all know, expertise is acquired through imparting knowledge to budding dental graduates and training them to spot even the slightest changes in the epithelium. In this article, we would like to emphasize on the same.

Diagnostic tools: Just keep your eyes open

Visual examination continues to be the gold standard for identifying the early epithelial changes. Criteria for inspection of the oral leukoplakia or squamous cell carcinoma includes changes [Figure 1] in surface texture, loss of surface integrity, color, size, contour deviations or mobility of intraoral or extra-oral structures.[6] Various diagnostic tools are available for diagnosis of oral cancer, but the gold standard remains tissue biopsy with histopathologic assessment. It needs a trained healthcare
provider and is invasive, expensive, time taking. Other alternatives are toluidine blue dye, chemiluminescence (ViziLite®, cytology (Brush biopsy), assessment devices (VELscope® and multispectral optical imaging system), and salivary diagnostics. Except for incisional biopsy, none has shown the equivalency or been confirmed to be superior to clinical examination.[9,10]

Performing duty the best way possible

The lack of prevention and early detection of oral cancer by health care provider is a worldwide problem. Most dentists claim to perform a thorough examination for oral cancer on their patients, but several studies indicate that dentists lack knowledge in relation to etiology and diagnosis.[7] The dentist should perform an oral cancer screening examination on every new patient at first visit and on every returning patient on an annual basis unless specific risk factors are identified that require more frequent screening. Smokers and alcohol users who are considered high risk should be examined every year regardless of their age.[11] If such measures are taken well within the time, probably, we can provide a better outcome of the treatment for those suffering with this most feared disease.

References
