

Dentists central to fight against oral cancer in new action plan

By Adrian O'Dowd

Dentists will be at the heart of a new drive to tackle oral cancer by ensuring patients have regular check-ups, delivering better detection and prevention of the disease and working towards better coordination with other health professionals, it has been revealed.

These aims are part of a new action plan due to be spelled out at a BDA Scotland

published by the Oral Health Foundation and Simplyhealth Professionals on 1 November 2018, which also stressed the fact that awareness of the major risk factors of mouth cancer – such as smoking, alcohol and human papillomavirus (HPV) – remains low.

New cases of mouth cancer in the UK have now reached 8,302 per year and this has increased by 49% in the last decade. Cancer

for effective smoking and alcohol treatment cessation services, and to adopt a proactive approach to target individuals who don't engage regularly with oral health services.'

The *Oral health improvement plan*³ that was launched [by the Scottish Government] in January contained proposals to extend the dental recall interval for some patients to 24 months, but this is opposed by the BDA, which says there should be a 12-months interval maximum for check-ups.

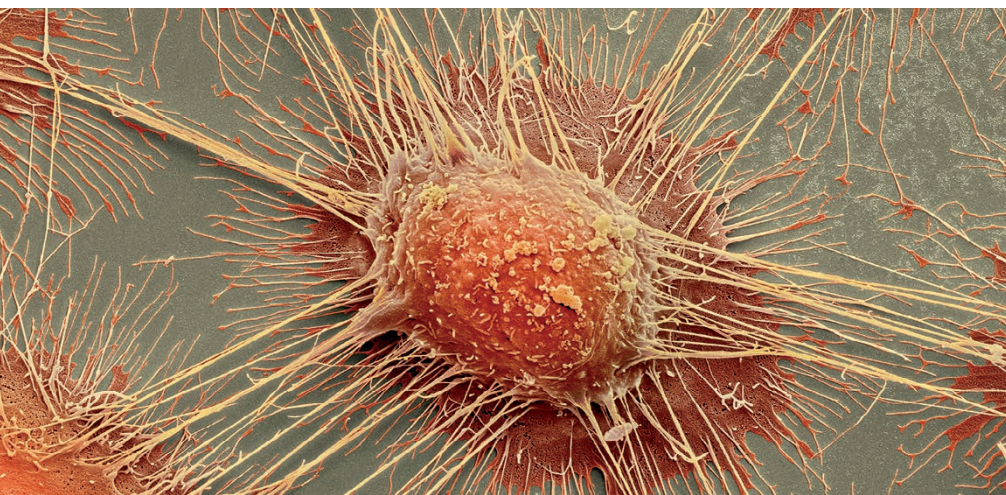
Grigor explained: 'Dentists have a large role to play in this area. It is one of the main initial ways of detecting oral cancer. Dentists seeing patients at a more regular interval is absolutely crucial even for those that are deemed to be low risk ie they don't smoke and don't drink. It's crucial that people are seen regularly.'

During the event, there were due to be verbal testimonials from oral cancer survivors to highlight the importance of early detection as Grigor added: 'We plan to discuss prevention, looking at things like HPV vaccinations, public health and smoking cessation, then early detection and offering mouth checks to MSPs, and joined-up services looking at referral pathways.'

'We are working with the British Medical Association on this, Community Pharmacy Scotland and we are developing partnerships and links with other organisations, for example, we have someone from ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) Scotland at the event.'

In the action plan Dr David Cross, Chair of the BDA Scotland Oral Cancer Working Group, stated: 'Our members are often the first health professionals to identify the tell-tale signs of oral cancer at a routine check-up. We have tapped into the insights of those on the front line in the battle against this preventable disease.' ■

1. BDA. Oral Cancer: A Plan for Action (13 November 2018). Available at https://bda.org/dentists/policy-campaigns/public-health-science/public-health/PublishingImages/Pages/Scotland-oral-cancer-awareness-campaign/Oral_cancer_plan_WEB.pdf (accessed 13 November 2018).
2. Oral Health Foundation and Simplyhealth Professionals. State of Mouth Cancer UK Report 2018/2019 (1 November 2018). Available at <https://www.dentalhealth.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDM-F=c4629724-3485-4781-9a0b-fa20da99ca67> (accessed 6 November 2018).
3. Scottish Government. Oral health improvement plan (24 January 2018). Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/oral-health-improvement-plan/> (accessed 6 November 2018).



event entitled *Stand Up to Oral Cancer* being held in Edinburgh on 13 November 2018, timed to coincide with Mouth Cancer Action Month in November.

The event, being held at the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh, will be attended by members of the profession, MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) and oral cancer experts and specialists.

BDA Scotland's new *Oral Cancer: A Plan for Action*¹ is structured around prevention, early detection and referral pathways.

Speaking before the event took place, as *BDJ* was going to press, Dr Phil Grigor, National Director, Scotland for the BDA, said: 'We want to stress the importance of regular checks, increased emphasis on prevention and making sure there are sufficient resources for that, and the importance of joined-up services.'

The growing problem was highlighted in the *State of Mouth Cancer Report 2018-19*²

Research UK estimates that incidence rates for oral cancers will rise by a further 33% in the UK by 2035.

Last year, 2,722 people in the UK died after developing mouth cancer and the 10-year survival rate is between 19% and 58%, depending on where the cancer strikes and how early it is diagnosed.

According to the action plan, in 2016, 1,240 people in Scotland were diagnosed with cancer of the head and neck, with rising mortality rates over the past decade.

Raising awareness of the disease is one of the main aims of the BDA Scotland event as well as sparking action, as Grigor added: 'The action plan has got specific actions and recommendations for the Scottish Government and NHS Boards.'

'One of the targets is to implement the HPV vaccination programme for boys as soon as possible, ensure sufficient resources