

If in DOUBT, get checked out

One person dies every five hours from mouth cancer in the UK. It kills more people than cervical cancer and testicular cancer combined and the number of annual mouth cancer cases increased by a staggering 41% in the last decade. Fewer than half of those diagnosed with the disease survive beyond five years of diagnosis but early detection and diagnosis can dramatically improve the survival chances to more than 90% (according to Cancer Research UK and the British Dental Health Foundation).

The British Dental Association (BDA) is running a one-day course led by prominent experts to help define the dental team's duty-of-care, offering information and advice on how to manage oral cancer effectively and sensitively. As is so often the case with cancer, raising awareness among the public and health care professionals is key to early diagnosis. Being alert to symptoms, encouraging patients to 'if in doubt, get checked out' and targeting high risk groups such as middle aged smokers and drinkers, are essential to combating this deadly disease. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that a growing number of patients are accusing their dentist of missing the signs and taking legal action.

Even though a third of cases of mouth cancer are found in the mouth cavity and a quarter on the tongue, many patients will automatically present to their GP. Thus, the aim of the campaign and training day is to educate the dental healthcare team so that patients will be more inclined to turn to a professional whose area of expertise is more appropriate and to ensure that those involved in oral healthcare are fully equipped with the knowledge to help their patients.

Known risk factors include tobacco use and alcohol which account for around 75% of mouth cancers but the practice of chewing tobacco, *paan*, areca nut and *gutkha* favoured by some ethnic groups is even more dangerous and ignorance of the risks are very high. A number of local authorities with large Asian populations are running public health campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of chewing tobacco,

A one-day course at the BDA helps define the dental team's duty-of-care regarding oral cancer.

and the benefits of stopping its use. There is also evidence from recent US studies that relates the human papilloma virus (HPV) to more than 20,000 oral cancer cases in the past five years leading experts to predict that HPV could overtake tobacco and alcohol as a major risk factor within the coming decade. Poor diet is linked to around a third of cases.

While it is clear there are many contributory factors and also a great need for sensitive and empathetic advice, the biggest single factor in the rampage of mouth cancer is ignorance – about symptoms and causes, which in turn leads to delays in diagnosis and treatment with the resultant unnecessary and tragically high death toll.

The BDA course on Friday 28 June 2013 and Friday 29 November 2013 in London is designed for the whole dental team and will cover:

- The team's key role in detecting the early signs of cancer or pre-cancer
- The risk factors of oral cancer and identification of high risk patients
- How to carry out a thorough examination with knowledge of the signs and symptoms
- Communicating appropriate advice to patients regarding the prevention of oral cancer
- Successfully implementing a management strategy for oral cancer that is suitable for the whole dental team.

The course leaders will be Saman Warnakulasuriya and Richard Cook. Saman Warnakulasuriya OBE is the Head of Oral Medicine at King's College Dental Institute and one of the leading experts in this field. He has published over 150 scientific peer reviewed articles and lectured extensively on the subject of oral cancer, having conducted several field surveys in different population groups. He is the director of the WHO Collaborating Centre



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for Oral Cancer and Pre-cancer in the United Kingdom and is on the editorial boards of *Oral Oncology*, the *Journal of Oral Pathology and Medicine*, the *International Journal of Clinical Dentistry* and *Head and Neck Oncology*. He was the principal investigator of an epidemiological study on oral cancer in young people, the largest reported so far from Europe.

Richard Cook is a Senior Lecturer in Oral Medicine, also from King's and a Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation Trust honorary clinical consultant, with specialist listings in oral medicine and surgery.

Although attendance on the course will count as five hours' verifiable CPD, the real achievement will be to cut the death toll from mouth cancer.

For further information on the BDA's Oral Cancer course, visit www.bda.org/training or call the BDA booking hotline: 020 7563 4590. Email events@bda.org.