

MEDIA RELEASE

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YOUR DENTIST SEES THINGS YOU CAN'T – INCLUDING ORAL CANCER

The Ontario Dental Association encourages all Ontarians to book an exam today

Toronto, ON – According to the Canadian Cancer Society, there were 1,150 estimated oral cancer deaths in Canada in 2010. This year, an estimated 3,400 new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed. Early detection is the best way to increase survival chances with this serious and often aggressive disease. Your dentist plays an important role in the early detection and diagnosis of oral cancer through a regular dental exam.

“As oral health experts, dentists are in a unique position to help in the early diagnosis of many medical conditions, including oral cancer,” says Dr. Lynn Tomkins, President of Ontario Dental Association. “Most people see their dentist regularly, so your dentist is often the first health-care professional to have an opportunity to detect the early signs of oral cancer.”

It is critical that oral cancer be diagnosed in its earliest possible stages to increase a patient’s chances of a full recovery. But signs of oral cancer can be easy to miss unless you know what you are looking for.

Just ask Lawrence Preston Tomkins, Dr. Tomkins’ father. During a routine dental examination, Dr. Tomkins noticed a small swollen area on the lip and referred the 85-year-old veteran to an oral surgeon. A biopsy revealed adysplasia, a pre-cursor to oral cancer.

“I see my father often and never noticed the swelling until I had him in the right environment – the dental chair,” said Dr. Tomkins. “The early signs of oral cancer are very easy to miss and it concerns me when people aren’t seeing their dentist regularly.”

Normally, the cells of the mouth are quite resistant to damage. However, the Ontario Dental Association wants people to be aware that repeated injury from smoking, alcohol or even friction may cause sores or painful areas where cancer can start. If left untreated, oral cancer has the potential to spread to the lymph nodes and lungs.

In her dental chair Dr. Tomkins has also noticed swellings and lesions on the head and neck areas of several patients, which have led to early diagnoses of other cancers, including those affecting the thyroid and skin.

“Avoiding high-risk activities such as smoking and sun exposure will not only help prevent oral cancer, but other cancers as well,” says Loraine Marrett, PhD, Director, Surveillance at Cancer Care Ontario.

“Prevention is best,” agrees Dr. Tomkins, “but for those who contract oral cancer, early diagnosis and immediate treatment can save their lives.”

Be sure to schedule a regular dental exam as part of a healthy oral health routine. If you notice a mouth sore or anything out of the ordinary that does not go away or heal after a couple of weeks, consult your dentist immediately.

For more information, visit the Oral Health Month page on our website - www.youroralhealth.ca

Backgrounder to follow.

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