

Significance of April month in Dentistry

SADJ April 2022, Vol. 77 No. 3 p120

Dr Nthabiseng Metsing, Head: Professional Development, SADA

April is oral cancer awareness and, in the USA, they also observe national facial protection month during this month as well. When it comes to identifying potential warning signs of oral cancer, dentists are often the first ones to notice any abnormalities. Screenings for oral cancers are performed during the normal dental visit, or even incidentally when patients present with other problems in the mouth. During this month we encourage dentists to be on the lookout for any suspicious lesions that may appear in the oral cavity, in order for patients to receive early intervention. While these are part of the routine visits, we use these days to amplify the messages that raise awareness because most people incorrectly regard dentists as doctors who only treat teeth.

Facial injuries due to sporting activities are a common occurrence and most of the time these are preventable by wearing proper protective gear. This month can also be used to educate athletes, parents, coaches and referees about the many ways that sport related facial injuries can be avoided (Johnsfamily dentistry, April 2018).

Oral Cancers

The risk factors for cancer are smoking or smokeless tobacco use, excessive consumption of alcohol, human papilloma virus (HPV), the use of snuff or betle nut, family history of cancer may predispose one to developing cancer as well as excessive exposure to the sun.

Diagnosing malignancies is very important in managing them and thus patients will respond positively to treatment, contrary undiagnosed malignancies can be very life threatening. Oral cancers may present on any tissues in the oral cavity, like the lips, the tongue, buccal mucosa, the tongue, hard and soft palate as well as in pharynx. As alluded before it is important to conduct further investigations or to refer the patient if you suspect a lesion may be carcinogenic. Symptoms may include lesions that do not heal, raised lesions, white or red patches on mucosa these are usually painful. Oral cancers have a slow progression rate and are mostly found in adults. More men than women get diagnosed with cancer, this may be linked to men engaging a lot of the risk factors than women. It is said that almost everyone who engages in sexual intercourse will get HPV, however a growing number of homosexual men are now presenting with oral HPV lesions. Multiple sexual partners also increase the risk of HPV.

In about 84% of people who are diagnosed early patients have a survival rate of 5 years and this number is reduced to 64% in patients who are diagnosed late in the disease progression (Poonam Sachdev,2018).

Facial injuries

Injuries to the face can have various causes which include, sporting activities, motor vehicle accidents, falls, blunt force trauma just to mention a few. These may lead to damage to your teeth, tissue or skin lacerations or even fracturing of



the bone(s) in the maxillofacial region. The treatment will be related to the type of injury sustained, which includes building up the teeth, root canal treatment, crown placement on teeth, intermaxillary fixation or even surgery to approximate the bony fragments with metal plates. Most patients respond very well to treatment however there are some patients who may require follow-up after 6 to 12 months. (Penn Medicine)

The symptoms of facial injuries include changes in sensations on the face, facial deformities or bleeding, challenges with breathing through the nose as a result of bleeding or swelling, contusion or swelling around the eye resulting in visual problems and missing teeth.

Prevention of facial injuries is related to the cause. Facial injuries caused by motor vehicle accidents may be prevented by the wearing of a seatbelt. Injuries due to sporting activities may be prevented by wearing of a face gear or a mouthguard, there are different types of face gears and mouthguards hence it is important to consult the dentist so that they advise on the best one to use based on the type of sport you engage in. Falls and blunt force trauma can happen in fights and most of the time are triggered by alcohol, so to prevent these we advise that people avoid getting into physical altercations especially when under the influence of alcohol.

Gender based violence (GBV) has been a really big topic in our country lately and research has also shown a rise in GBV cases since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it has been revealed that some perpetrators will focus on victims' lower body, there are others who will cause facial injuries. This makes it more important in my opinion to involve law enforcement when such cases to present to your practice, this is mainly because a lot of these victims sadly end up losing their lives.

We would like encourage oral health practitioners to use the month of April to amplify the importance of being on the lookout for oral cancers and the importance of protecting your face because it is a fundamental part of the body for self-recognition.