

Editorial

Be an Opportunistic Screener in Your Clinical Practice ...

The recent major health transitions through technologies and socioeconomic changes have increased the human life expectancy. Rising longevity, alterations in lifestyle, increased exposure to risk factors and progressive control of communicable diseases have led to the emergence of noncommunicable diseases like cancer. The challenges in providing clinical care for cancer are many. Proper planning and implementation of health care delivery system is the need of the hour.

Evidence-based clinical practice and appropriate use of technologies should be promoted at all levels of health care, including tertiary services.

Prevention, early detection and appropriate timely treatment are the known and applicable pathways for cancer control in any society. Major issues related to oral cancer are lack of awareness, delayed presentation and diagnosis. Presently, almost 65 to 70% of cancer patients present themselves at medical facilities in the advanced stages when the cure rates are lower. Recognition of benign and malignant mucosal lesions will contribute significantly to proper treatment planning. Major advantage of screening for malignant lesions of oral cavity is that it is preceded by months or years of premalignant lesions. Sites are accessible for self examination, and localized lesions when detected, are highly curable. Late detection of cancer will mandate complex treatment and has a poor outcome.

Screening in oral cancer has a defining role in fighting the disease.

Screening is the search for unrecognized disease or defect by means of rapidly applied tests, examinations and other procedures in apparently healthy individuals. It is also defined as the process by which the practitioner evaluates an asymptomatic patient to determine if he or she is “likely or unlikely” to have potentially premalignant or malignant lesions. In mass screening programs, also known as community-based or population-based screening, the target group is invited to participate specially for the purpose of detecting potentially malignant lesions.

In routine dental practice, the screening for oral cancer occurs when a patient reports for care. This is often referred to as opportunistic screening. Dental institutions can set up mass screening programs while practitioners can contribute as opportunistic screeners. The aim will be to create awareness, de-addict the habits and play a vital role in early detection and prevention program for oral cancer. Institutions can reach out to the community to provide early diagnosis and facilitate access for speedy outcome. Telemedicine, teleradiology and teleconsultations with specialists can be used as per the need. To prevent oral cancer, involvement of all health care providers is critical. Opportunistic screener’s contribution will have a huge impact in controlling the advancement of lesions.

Though our health care is mainly aimed to achieve optimal cure, the emphasis on prevention is the need of the hour. It is evident that most common cancers are preventable. If appropriate strategies like opportunistic screening are established and developed in all dental clinics, the deadly disease can be controlled. Let us all put in our contribution to prevent the progression of oral cancer. Be an opportunistic screener and make the difference.

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