

## **Mouth Cancer Awareness Week 2007**

### **The Role of the Dental Practice in Mouth Cancer Awareness**

Dental practices have a massive role to play in raising public awareness of mouth cancer. Early detection increases survival chances from one in two to nine out of 10, so it is vital that people know what to look out for.

Mouth Cancer Awareness Week provides the perfect opportunity for dentists to look at their own efforts in raising awareness of mouth cancer - and to consider how they can improve.

#### **Talk about mouth cancer**

It is not enough to check patients for early signs of mouth cancer at every visit. You also need to tell them what you are doing so they know what symptoms to look out for when they are away from the surgery.

According to research by the Foundation, over half of people over the age of 45 think they have never been checked for mouth cancer and, while this certainly doesn't prove they are not being checked, it does suggest that they are not being told about it - and that is a missed opportunity.

#### **Hand out information**

When doing a lifestyle check or updating a patient's medical history, you should take the opportunity to give them a mouth cancer leaflet.

High risk groups such as smokers, drinkers and older people should be a priority but, with around 25% of younger sufferers presenting none of the risk factors, it would be better if you could give this information to all patients.

Research has found that providing information in a written format leads to far better information recollection. It also allows the patient to refer back to it at any time, should they forget any of the details.

The Foundation's 'Tell Me About Mouth Cancer' leaflets are ideal for this.

#### **Smoking Cessation**

The Department of Health recommends that all dentists facilitate smoking cessation with their patients.

Check patients' lifestyle habits at every visit and discuss the dangers of tobacco use with those that smoke.

As well as handing out a mouth cancer leaflet you should direct patients to the 'services' section of the NHS website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) where they can find stop smoking services in their area. You may also wish to contact your local stop smoking service yourself to see if they can provide you with any leaflets or resources to give away.

#### **Set up a Display**

In the months surrounding Mouth Cancer Awareness Week it can be a good idea to set up a display to raise awareness of the condition.

The official campaign poster, created by Denplan in association with the Foundation, looks excellent and is available free of charge.

You can also get T-shirts, inflatable cigarettes, ribbon mugs, leaflets and CD-ROMS from the Foundation, while the Blue Ribbon Badge Collection Box can be displayed all year round.

### **Blue Ribbon Badge Collection Box - *the dental worlds own Charity appeal***

The Blue Ribbon Badge Collection Box might be launched each year in Mouth Cancer Awareness Week, but really it should be displayed all year round.

With every member of your team wearing a blue ribbon badge in Mouth Cancer Awareness Week you are publicly showing support for a condition that - thanks to its effect on the face and basic human functions like eating and talking - is known to be among the most distressing and psychologically damaging for sufferers.

Also, by encouraging people to ask you and your staff about the badge, you are creating an ideal opportunity to educate them on the dangers of mouth cancer. Awareness saves lives, so this is incredibly important.

To request your free Blue Ribbon Badge Kit contact the Foundation follows the instructions in the box **on the right**.

### **Mouth Cancer Examination Afternoon**

Although Department of Health guidelines call for dentists to check their patients for mouth cancer at every appointment, organising a specific 'mouth cancer examination afternoon' can be a great way of raising awareness among the local community.

Do this during Mouth Cancer Awareness Week and you might well attract the attention of the local press and radio. Give them a call or send them an email offering to carry out a check on one of their journalists in return for an article. This will really help to raise awareness and will make for great PR for the practice.

### **Team meeting**

It is worth remembering that patients won't always wait to ask the dentist for advice - they might sometimes stop at the dental nurse or just speak to the receptionist on the telephone.

For this reason it is vital that all members of your team are fully versed on the key risk factors and symptoms of mouth cancer.

If your receptionist takes a call from someone complaining of a mouth ulcer they need to be ready to ask them how long they have had it, and to book an appointment if it has been longer than three weeks.

Use Mouth Cancer Awareness Week to look at how up-to-date your team is with their knowledge of mouth cancer. Spend the weeks running up to the campaign making sure they are fully informed on the key symptoms and risk factors - and keep this up throughout the year.

### **Sponsored Activity**

During Mouth Cancer Awareness Week, you can draw people's attention to mouth cancer by taking part in a sponsored activity - the more difficult or quirky the activity, the more likely it is to have an impact.

A sponsored run or cycle ride can be a good start, but a parachute jump or abseil might result in more sponsorship.

A less taxing option (for some) might be to organise a sponsored silence.

A sponsored silence is good because as well as being quite an usual task, it also helps raise awareness of one of the possible effects of mouth cancer - effect on speech.

It can certainly bring out good humour among participants and last year a female dentist received £25 from her husband in return for a day's silence!

### **Key messages**

Whatever publicity you generate in the run-up to Mouth Cancer Awareness Week, it is important that you use it to promote the key messages of the campaign.

Mouth Cancer Awareness Week 2007 will return to the theme 'If in doubt, get checked out' to remind the public of the importance of early detection.

- Non healing ulcers
- Red or white patches
- Any unusual changes in the mouth
- Smokers and drinkers are most at risk

For more information on Mouth Cancer Awareness Week visit the official website [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org). For your free guide or Blue Ribbon Collection Box email [pr@dentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:pr@dentalhealth.org.uk) or call 0870 770 4000.

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### **Blue Ribbon Badge Campaign**

The money raised from the Blue Ribbon Badge Campaign has enabled the Foundation to launch a range of initiatives designed to further increase awareness of mouth cancer.

These include a new comprehensive website on the condition, the first public national survey on mouth cancer, a large-scale Radio Day and a prestigious launch of Mouth Cancer Awareness Week at the House of Commons.

With your support we can do even more next year!

To request your free Blue Ribbon Badge Kit contact the Foundation by:

- Phone - 0870 770 4000
- Fax - 0870 770 4010
- Email - [pr@dentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:pr@dentalhealth.org.uk)
- Letter - Blue Ribbon Badge Kit, British Dental Health Foundation, 2 East Union Street, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV22 6AJ

All we need is *your postal address* and we will send you:

- One Collection box
- 50 enamel ribbon pin badges
- One official poster
- Paying-in slip
- Instructions for use



Jain found out she had cancer of the tongue on the same day she heard she was expecting her second child. Two years later she discovered a lump in her neck.

I found out I had cancer of the tongue in June 2000 aged 39, on the same day that I found out I was pregnant with my second child. I was working full-time as a personnel manager in a large London law firm when I started getting mouth ulcers in November 1999. One in particular would not go away and started to become very troublesome. The firm's doctor recommended mouth washes, trying to reduce stress etc. but it was still there after a couple of months and getting worse. Eventually, my dentist advised me to get it seen by a specialist as soon as possible as he didn't think it looked at all right. He referred me to an Oral surgeon who performed a biopsy under local anaesthetic. The phone call came a few days later to give me the bad news that the ulcer was in fact a cancerous tumour.

In early July a surgeon performed a partial glossectomy (removal of part of the left hand side of the tongue): the operation would be quite long and miscarriage was one of the risks involved. My partner, Tony, proposed to me just before I was taken down for the operation! I recovered well although it does take a while to regain speech and to be able to eat properly. Neither chemotherapy nor radiotherapy was considered, mainly because I was pregnant. Less than 3 months later my partner, Tony, and I were married. I gave birth to a healthy baby girl (our miracle baby!) in March 2001.

Nearly 2 years to the day after having the tumour removed from my tongue I felt a lump in the left hand side of my neck. Following a biopsy, which confirmed that, unfortunately, the lump was malignant, a left radical neck dissection was performed. This involved the removal of most of the lymph nodes in the left side of my neck. Luckily, only one of the nodes contained a tumour. The recovery from this operation took longer and I have a scar down the centre of my neck, although it is now barely visible.

It is nearly 5 years since I had the operation on my neck and I continue to be grateful for my quality of life. I have periodic scans and check-ups and I practise yoga twice a week and run to keep fit. I also take selenium, which apparently helps to support the immune system. I am lucky enough to sing in a band and perform about 10 gigs a year. My daughters, now aged 6 and 9, are healthy, beautiful and an endless source of joy and I have two lovely stepchildren. Having cancer has been an experience, which has been, at times, frightening and painful and I would not wish to go back or experience it again but in a strange way it has enriched my life. It is a cliché but I have learned that life is precious and that there are some marvellous people to meet and some wonderful moments to treasure along the way.

*This case study was kindly provided by Saving Faces ([www.savingfaces.co.uk](http://www.savingfaces.co.uk)). Saving Faces are part of the Mouth Cancer Steering Group that is coordinated by the British Dental Health Foundation, supported by Denplan and backed by a wide range of leading national health organisations. These include Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), British Dental Association, British Association of Head and Neck Oncologists, British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial*

*Surgeons, Cancer Research UK, the health departments of the four UK countries, GKT, Medical Council on Alcohol, Mouth Cancer Foundation, Pharmacy Health Link, QUIT and Scope.*