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Original Research

Evaluation of Awareness of Dentists about Oral Cancer in Jammu

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***ABSTRACT*:**
Introduction: Oral cancer is major public health problem in the Indian subcontinent, where it ranks among the top three types of cancer in the country. **Materials and methods:** This study was conducted among the dentists practicing in Jammu. A total of 150 randomly selected dental practitioners were enrolled in the study. For this study, a validated questionnaire of 10 questions was distributed among all the participants of the study. **Results**: 98 % of dentists preferred to have more training toward oral cancer diagnosis methods and treatment options available. 96 % of dentists were aware of the risk factors for oral cancer, but only 54 % of them said that they inform the patients about the risk factors of oral cancer. **Conclusions**: Although the basic knowledge of the dentists about oral cancer is good, it is not adequate enough and practices about risk factors had to be reinforced among these dentists so that they can help the patients in tobacco and alcohol cessation and contribute in the prevention of oral cancers.
Key words: oral cancer, dentist, awareness.

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INTRODUCTION

Oral cancer is major public health problem in the Indian subcontinent, where it ranks among the top three types of cancer in the country.[1] Oral cancers include those of the lip, tongue, salivary glands and other sites in the mouth, whereas pharyngeal cancers affect the nasopharynx, oropharynx and hypopharynx. Most oral cancers are attributed to the use of tobacco products that are smoked or chewed. The combined use of tobacco and alcohol significantly increases the risk of these cancers. Other risk factors include actinic radiation for lip cancer, a lack of fruits and vegetables in the diet, and human papillomavirus.[2] The oral cavity is usually easily accessible for examination and thus offers the potential for opportunistic screening for intraoral cancer. For opportunistic screening to be effective, it is vital that primary care clinicians should be aware of the variety of presentations of malignant and premalignant disease. Treatment at an early stage improves prognosis. Dentists are qualified to opportunistically screen for oral cancer and to provide preventive advice such as cessation of habits and counselling interventions during routine examinations.[3] It is vital that dentists have accurate knowledge about oral cancer to identify individuals at risk, examine the mouth to document tissue changes and provide appropriate interventions, thus potentially contributing to the reduction in oral cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality.[4] Dentists are professionally responsible for determining whether patients are at risk of developing oral cancer, as well as for providing a comprehensive oral cancer examination for their patients. Dentists are important in primary and secondary prevention of oral cancer; Therefore, assessing their knowledge, opinions and practices is crucial. The purposes of this study was to evaluate the awareness of dentists about oral cancer in Jammu.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted among the dentists practicing in Jammu. A total of 150 randomly selected dental practitioners were enrolled in the study. For this study, a validated questionnaire of 10 questions was distributed among all the participants of the study, and

the questions were designed to assess their basic knowledge and awareness about oral cancer. The data so obtained from the survey were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 and results obtained.

RESULTS

Among 150 dentists who participated in the study, 92 % of dentists agreed that family history plays an important role in oral cancer. 83 % of dentists said that they ask for relevant family history for oral cancer while taking a case history 100% of dentists said that they routinely ask about the personal history for all patients. 78% of dentists were aware about the various treatments available for management of oral cancer, and only 46 % of participants were aware about the treatment costs for oral cancer. 98 % of dentists preferred to have more training toward oral cancer diagnosis methods and treatment options available. 96 % of dentists were aware of the risk factors for oral cancer, but only 54 % of them said that they inform the patients about the risk factors of oral cancer. 59 % of dentists were aware of where to refer the patients with oral cancer, but 41% were not sure. (Table 1) All of the participants (100%) agreed that dentists are the first personnel to identify oral cancerous lesions at its early stage.

Table 1

Awareness of participants about where to refer the patients with oral cancer	
Aware	Unaware
59%	41%

DISCUSSION

In a study by Okoh and Enabulele [5], although the graduating dental students easily identified alcohol and tobacco as risk factors for oral cancers, knowledge of other risk factors such as poor nutrition, and sunlight was on the average, and a total of 96.7% of the dental students routinely ask patients on the use of alcohol and tobacco, whereas in our study 96% of dentists were aware of all the risk factors for oral cancer and 100% of dentists said that they routinely ask about the personal history for all patients. In relation to cancer prevention and risk factors for oral cancer, 54% dentists of our study routinely give advice to their patient whereas in a study conducted in Spain it was found that 51.4% dentists give such advice to their patient [6] and 65% dentists in a study by Bhati *et al.*[7]. In a study by Anderson Rocha-Buelvas *et al*.[8] over half the respondents (59.14%) believe that it is important to evaluate the patient's personal history of tumors, but that less than a quarter (22.58%) evaluate family history of cancer. In our study, 92% of dentists agreed that family history plays an important role in oral cancer and 83% dentists said that they ask for relevant family history for oral cancer while taking case history. A 98% agreed, there is need for additional training/information regarding oral cancer which is comparable to 90% as reported by Carter *et al.* [9] and 94.6% according to Fotedar *et al.* [10] Also in a study by Bhati *et al.* [7] on attitude and practice of dentists in Belgaum city, regarding oral cancer prevention suggest strongly that educational interventions and training for practitioners are necessary. Studies by Anderson Rocha-Buelvas *et al*., [8] and Ariyawardana and Ekanayake [11] agree that dentists feel; they need more and better training regarding prevention and detection of oral cancers. In countries like the USA, it has been shown that there is a need for educational programs on oral cancers, for further training of primary care providers [12]. Various studies emphasize the need for continuing dental education on oral cancer prevention and treatment for the undergraduate dental students. [13,14]

CONCLUSIONS:

Although the basic knowledge of the dentists about oral cancer is good, it is not adequate enough and practices about risk factors had to be reinforced among these dentists so that they can help the patients in tobacco and alcohol cessation and contribute in the prevention of oral cancers. Educational programs should focus on risk factors, screening, behavior modification, counselling, physical examination of oral cancer and criteria for referral to specialist for biopsy to facilitate definitive diagnosis and management. Morbidity and mortality are likely to be reduced if dentists know how to prevent and detect oral cancer.

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