

ORAL CANCER AWARENESS: TECH AND TRENDS TO KNOW

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Abstract

Almost one person is killed by oral per hour of every day of the year. Only over 60% of those recently diagnosed with these tumours will survive for more than five years. Furthermore, a large number of survivors experience chronic issues such as severe facial deformities or trouble speaking and eating. Because oral and pharyngeal cancers are often detected late in their development, the fatality rate from these diseases is still very high. This brings up the significance of raising awareness about oral cancer.

Keywords: Oral Cancer, Awareness, Diagnosis.

Introduction

In the present century, the rapid growth of non-communicable diseases is considered a serious health challenge that threatens the socioeconomic development of communities and people's health. Cancer is one of the most notorious and life-threatening form of non-communicable disease with an increased rate of emergence recently. One of the most common types of cancer is the cancer of head and neck.¹ Oral cancer, which is a subset of head and neck cancers, refers to any cancerous growth in the oral cavity. Oral cancer is a serious and growing problem in many countries. Epidemiological studies show that the incidence of oral cancer and its mortality varies in different parts of the world.²

Present sensorium

In India oral cancer is a major public health problem where it ranks among top three types of cancer in the country. In India, around 77,000 new cases and

52,000 deaths are reported annually, which is approximately one-fourth of global incidences. The low-income groups in India are affected most due to a wide exposure to risk factors such as tobacco chewing and insufficient exposure to newly diagnostic aids, resulting in a delay in reporting of oral cancer.³

Importance of Awareness

Awareness of disease and symptom is essential for screening and early detection. If the public is more aware of a disease and its symptoms, they are more likely to seek treatments, even preventive measures to tackle the very inception of the disease process, nipping the causative factor in the pre-pathogenesis stage.

Lack of awareness is due to absence, inaccessibility or inaccuracy of information, which is sometimes made harder by cultural taboos, myths and fears, which can stop people from seeking treatment. Diagnostic delay is an important causative factor so as to why oral cancer presents generally with a poor prognosis and an overall 5- year survival rate of only 40%.⁴

Studies have shown that if detected and diagnosed in an early stage the survival rate can exceed 80%. Up to 50% of oral cancers are diagnosed only at a later stage as the patient tends to be asymptomatic in the stages of inception and would visit the doctor only when they present with symptoms like pain, bleeding or a mass in mouth.⁵

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Here, the age-old time-tested saying comes into being: “prevention is better than cure.” A key to prevention is awareness. Lack of awareness also leads to stigma, which can worsen health outcomes and can be divisive in society and can affect the quality of life.

Health education is vital to the practice of prevention. It is the channel to reaching people and alerting them to the various services and health resources available.

The cognitive objective of health education is to inform people about the different diseases, their aetiology and prevention. With the improved educational standards and the Law prescribing Right to Education to all, the population is getting more accustomed to learning about what is normal human biology and hence they can self-spot any variation within their own bodies.⁶ Successful therapy begins with awareness of symptoms and diseases. Self-examination is the most effective method of early diagnosis. A quasi-experimental study in Australia found the importance of oral self-examination in reducing the incidence and mortality of oral cancers.

Arts and humanities have a role to play in allowing individuals and communities to express experiences of illness, death, and grief and encourage conversations and thoughtful reflection. Most people tend to empathize with expressive content that describes the state of life with a particular condition.

Here the advent of affordable print media and the ever-popular social media comes into play. By creating a platform for open discussion, the media has reduced the world to a global village. The use of media was especially appreciated when The Pandemic struck the population.

A non-communicable disease like cancer never halts in presence of a pandemic. Hence even when the entire world was forced to be crammed up in their living spaces, the act of transferring information had to be carried on. Hence social media provided a very personalized platform for open discussions. A new approach was to

involve either survivors or People currently undergoing treatment or their families. By sharing their experiences through examples of their life and disease the survivors make aware the population the future that beholds them if they don't seek timely intervention, which acted as one of the most persuasive tools of open communication.

The most effective strategy till date remains the Counselling of the individual and population who are slave to habits that present with a chance of presenting serious cancerous and precancerous condition.

Government and non-Government organizations utilized the affordable internet platforms to conduct webinars and in-person sessions that help the public gain a face-to-face access with the situation they've just heard about.

Health awareness campaigns can help motivate, educate and inform the public about various health issues. Experts play a role by publishing newsletters, magazines and other publications.

Funding of local community partners to screen, spread awareness and counsel, and empower the public with knowledge to safeguard and manage their own health.

Global initiatives in the awareness and prevention of oral cancer include The Crete Declaration on Oral Cancer Prevention 2005, WHO Framework Convention On Tobacco Control (WHO FTC), Bloomberg Initiatives To Reduce Tobacco Use. These philanthropies as well as government aided forums aim at dissemination of information on oral cancer, prevention and care through every possible means of communication.

Global health days, an initiative of UN and WHO, offer great potential to raise awareness and understanding about health issues and mobilize support for action, from the local community to the international stage.

It is through commemoration of days like these that we focus on the aspect of multifactorial aetiology of diseases like

head and neck cancer, which is important to destigmatize the whole concept and promote and motivate more people to be aware of their susceptibility. It also motivates more people to come out and seek treatment.

It is not just the spread of information that is important, but also the act of tackling and addressing misinformation. The concept of inoculation education is a theory that explains how attitudes and beliefs can be made more resistant to future challenges. Hence the population has to be trained from the grassroots level to question the credibility of information, no matter how convincing it sounds.

The mere presence of information doesn't improve health. After the act of imparting necessary knowledge, it is essential to motivate the population to change their ideology and lifestyle in a way that helps in focusing more on prevention of diseases

A significant 34% reduction in oral cancer mortality among high-risk group of smokers and alcoholics after a three round oral vision screening has been shown in a randomized controlled cluster trial in India. A 15-year follow-up study showed a steady decline in oral cancer mortality, with a further decline in those who adhere to frequent screening courses.

With the objective of obtaining reliable data on the magnitude and patterns of cancer, their epidemiology and with to aid in designing, planning, monitoring and evaluation of cancer control activities, The National Cancer Registry Program commenced in 1981.

Hence three Population Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs) and three Hospital Based Cancer Registries have been set up across India to aid in effective management strategies

With the public and investors in the healthcare sector being more aware of the emerging public health problems, more

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fields of examination and instrumentation have opened up. These include histopathological examination, vital staining techniques and biopsy and an effective tool for screening. Hence it gave rise to the commercialization and improved accessibility to diagnostic aids such as Lugol's iodine and methylene blue and was ground breaking in promoting frequent screening of suspected disorders.⁷

Effective and newer screening methods that incorporate principles of molecular biology and better and narrow band imaging help to pinpoint even minute defects and deviations, providing a larger safety margin in the population. Autofluorescence spectroscopy and imaging, the use of biological aids like tumour markers, advanced scanning methods like PET, microsatellite analysis etc.⁸

Human resource is the most valuable resource hence moulding them with awareness is necessary. Public health is the biggest responsibility upon the shoulders of anyone in the practicing field. It is the realization that health is a common goal of the public. Health is a basic commodity and the basic right for everyone. Hence maintaining health for all and ensuring equal health is a bare necessity. In the dawn of this age, when India is closed to being titled the "oral cancer capital" of the world, it serves as a wake-up call for the public to utilize the innovative methods presented to us in order to prevent the very occurrence of the disease.

Conclusion

A state of absence of disease is the first step to achieving optimum health and living conditions which is absolutely necessary for increased and improved quality of life.

Health is a promise and responsibility we owe to no one else but ourselves.

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