



Write it down and the rest will follow!

For more on this topic, go to www.dentaleconomics.com and search using the following key words: *oral cancer, cancer, oral cancer detection, cancer examination, cancer test.*

Dozens of self-help books and lecturers tell us to write down our goals, since GOALS THAT ARE REVIEWED DAILY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE ACHIEVED. In dentistry, we can and must take a lesson from these gurus of “moving thoughts to action” when it comes to early oral cancer detection.

The facts: shocking but true

- Every hour someone dies from oral cancer in the United States.
- The five-year survival rate has remained basically unchanged at 50% for the past 35 years. When diagnosed and treated early, the survival rate can go up to almost 90%. When diagnosed in late stages, the survival rate can go as low as 25%.
- There is an epidemic surge in recent years of oral cancers directly related to human papillomavirus 16/18, which now makes up 22% of all oral cancers diagnosed each year and rising.
- The number two cause of dental malpractice suits is related to a lack of diagnosis or delayed diagnosis of oral cancer, with the *average* payout between \$875,000 and \$1 million, causing some dentists to become uninsurable and unable to practice.

What happened?

Weren't we all taught the complete extraoral and intraoral examination processes in school? Today, aren't there adjunctive technologies that aid our visual/bimanual white light examination to make us even more effective in the early detection of oral cancer? The answer to both questions is *yes, of course!*

Somehow, many of us have developed habits that keep us from doing what we know we should be doing every day all day long: *effective early oral cancer detection for every patient.*

Break old patterns starting with a mission statement

The process of gaining consensus and writing down a mission statement for our dental practice is a very powerful and effective tool when it comes to defining purpose, direction, and goals for early oral cancer detection in a dental office. Why?

- 1 There is “ownership” through individual participation.
- 2 Clarity of purpose is created as the foundation for all other actions.
- 3 Seeing and reading the written words literally “makes it happen.”

Everything that happens successfully within the practice has its basis in the agreed upon mission if we have defined it that way or not. Having a mission statement specifically related to early oral cancer detection will, I think, recommit the dentist and team to these important screening procedures.

Creating a mission statement in three easy steps

For those of you who have no experience creating a mission statement, here are the three easy steps”

- 1 Set aside uninterrupted time for your team to meet.
- 2 Write down and discuss all words and phrases that the group believes reflect what they and the practice “are all about” regarding early oral cancer detection.
- 3 Create and agree upon two short sentences using the best of the written words and phrases.

Now that you have it... what do you do with it?

Now that you have a clearly stated your mission statement for early oral cancer detection, what next? Post it in the team lounge/meeting room/lunchroom and in the sterilization area. Hang framed versions in the reception and treatment rooms for patients to see. Have your team read it aloud once a day on their own and together at team meetings. Proudly talk to patients about it. See it, say it, and make it happen each day.

Whether your motivation is the threat of a malpractice suit or saving lives or that complete oral cancer screening is an integral part of providing excellent clinical dental care, creating a written mission statement for early oral cancer detection will engage dentist and team while exciting patients with your practice's commitment to oral health. Make a commitment *now* to appropriately screen every patient for oral cancer! **DE**

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