

Early oral cancer detection: Why you? Why now?

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What motivates any of us as dental health-care providers? Specifically, what motivates us to do a complete early oral cancer screening? As I travel around the country discussing the topic of early oral cancer detection, four key motivators stand out.

1. Malpractice risk

Are you familiar with these malpractice facts?

- Lack of diagnosis or delayed diagnosis of oral cancer is the No. 2 reason for malpractice claims in the U.S.
- The average claim is settled for approximately 1 million ? yes 1 million ? dollars
- The average age of claimants is early 40s
- It is the hardest suit to defend

Did that get your attention? I hope so! Why do so many dentists lose these lawsuits, with some dentists literally now unable to purchase malpractice insurance at all?

The answer is simple: The lack of a complete and properly recorded early oral cancer screening examination. Maybe this could be your motivator to incorporate an early oral cancer screening system into your office.

2. The right way to practice dentistry

In dentistry, as with all professions, the terms "best practice" or "excellence in service/care" are very broad. How dentistry is performed on a daily basis is up to the individual practitioner and his/her dental team. Also, included in the mix is the number of "unique" or "different" procedures performed in the office.

Thus, defining excellent care or "the right way to practice dentistry" varies. A complete early oral cancer screening may be a key part of what is excellent care for you.

- It's just the right way to do a complete examination of any patient.
- It was expected during my training, so I continued it into my private practice.
- I like to have this complete exam done for me, so I'll do it for my patients.

Are you motivated by the fact that this is just the right way to practice dentistry, the way you were taught? Does it feel ethically and morally right to do a complete oral cancer screening?

3. Saving lives

Every hour of every day of every month of every year, someone dies of oral cancer in the U.S. Startling, isn't it?

Here are some more startling statistics:

- The average five-year survival rate for oral cancer has remained at 50% for the past 35 to 40 years.
- The number of newly diagnosed cases of oral cancer has steadily risen annually from 5% to

11% over the past few years.

-- Death from oral cancer is twice that from cervical cancer.

The list goes on.

We all know that, as with any cancer, the earlier it is caught, the better the patient's chances of survival. The more effectively we can screen for oral cancer in our patients, the earlier we can discover those abnormalities. Motivated by saving lives? Many dentists are.

4. Enhancing the financial bottom line

"Show me the money!" is the popular catch phrase from the movie, "Jerry Maguire." Dentistry is, indeed, a business. Whatever we can do to increase our revenue without a significant increase in our overhead will improve our "financial bottom line."

The new patient experience, as it is called, can be a WOW experience for the patient if it's done in a comprehensive manner. The same goes for the dental hygiene exam during the preventive recare visit.

If we WOW our new and continuing care patients with the thoroughness of our examination by including a complete early oral cancer screening, they will refer their family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. That is considered to be at \$1,000 value per new patient by most current practice management consultants. Also, we all know that the best new patient is one referred by a happy and satisfied patient of record.

Financial success will always be a motivator for many.

What will it be for you?

What will motivate you to do a complete early oral cancer screening?

- Malpractice risk
- It is just the right way to do dentistry
- Saving lives
- Financial gain

Did you answer one, or does more than one factor motivate you?

Whatever your motivation, you should become part of the nationwide effort to change the course of oral cancer for our patients by doing a complete early oral cancer screening. It's about time you do!

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