

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

## General Dental Surgeons in Oral Cancer Prevention

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Oral cancer is one of the common malignancies reported from India. This cancer is the first most common malignancy among Indian males.<sup>1</sup> Even with advancements of treatment the five year survival rate still remains less than 50%.<sup>2</sup>

Majority of the oral cancers (around 65%) were found to be preceded by non-invasive precursor alteration of the mucosa known as potentially malignant disorders. PMD's can be used as intermediate markers for oral cancer prevention. It is found that an average of 5 year period often occurs before the malignant transformation of these PMD's.<sup>1</sup> This is a golden period during which secondary prevention of oral cancer can be achieved by managing PMD's. Hospital based studies have shown that professional delay and total diagnostic delay are major concerns in the management and prognosis of oral cancers.<sup>3,4</sup>

Oral visual examination is a cost-effective oral cancer control measure which is implementable in Indian scenario with a sensitivity of 85% and specificity of 97%.<sup>2</sup> Dental surgeons are the primary healthcare professional who have the opportunity to routinely examine the oral cavity. They are optimally placed in the health care system to conduct screening of patients attending their dental clinic for PMD's and oral cancers. This is known as opportunistic screening.<sup>5</sup> Studies have shown that opportunistic screening in dental clinics are more effective than organized screening in oral cancer prevention.<sup>6</sup> This step can prevent oral cancers by identifying and managing potentially malignant disorders and improve the prognosis of oral cancers by identifying them at the earliest.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to sensitize the practicing dental surgeons on their role in oral cancer prevention. Focus should be put more by the professional associations to

conduct workshops and training programs for general dental surgeons on the latest trends and technologies in early identification of oral cancers.

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