BDA warns against restricting dental visits to once every two years

By Dental Tribune UK

STIRLING, UK: A recent survey conducted by the British Dental Association (BDA) has found that a Scottish government initiative to potentially extend the time between dental appointments to 24 months has caused concern among Scottish dentists regarding possible delayed diagnosis of oral cancer.

Earlier this year, the Scottish government launched the Oral Health Improvement Plan, which outlines, among other things, a focus on improving prevention, reducing oral health inequalities, and meeting the needs of an ageing population. Though the BDA welcomed these ambitions, it expressed dismay that the plan recommends that certain patients with good oral health should only attend dental check-ups once every two years. A subsequent BDA survey of Scottish dentists found that 97 per cent of respondents are concerned that these extensions of recall intervals could undermine the detection of oral cancers, which 77 per cent regard as a major or severe risk.

Scotland has seen a 37 per cent increase in oral cancer deaths over the past decade, and incidence rates are among the highest in Europe. Though it is primarily caused by smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and human papilloma virus infections, oral cancer can also occur in individuals leading generally healthy lifestyles. Given that survival rates for oral cancer improve from 50 per cent to 90 per cent with early detection, regular check-ups are essential.

Dr David Cross, Vice Chair of the BDA’s Scottish Council, said: “Dentists are on the front line of a battle against some of the fastest rising cancers in Scotland. Early detection is key, but now risks becoming a casualty of a cost-cutting exercise.”

“People in otherwise good health are succumbing to this disease. Telling our ‘lower risk’ patients to come back in two years will only handicap efforts to meet a growing threat, while putting further pressure on NHS cancer services,” he continued.

“Oral cancer now claims three times as many lives in Scotland as car accidents. Rather than chasing quick savings we need to see concrete plans and real investment to help turn the tables on this devastating but preventable disease,” Cross advised.
Developing cardiovascular disease.

One’s teeth less than twice a day for at least 2 minutes may reduce one’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

In response, the Oral Health Foundation, a leading charity working to combat oral disease in the UK, stressed the importance of taking charge of one’s oral health, stating that it can provide benefits that go far beyond the mouth.

“Findings like this may sound slightly scary to hear but it could prove to be just the push we need to take better care of our oral health,” said Dr Nigel Carter, OBE, CEO of the Oral Health Foundation. “This study adds to the growing scientific evidence that this is a strong link between the health of our mouth and that of our body.”

“For many years, gum disease has been linked with conditions like strokes, diabetes, dementia, and pregnancy outcomes. These are all serious conditions that could impact on a person’s quality of life,” he continued.

“Looking after our mouth should be a priority every day and the benefits of doing so are simply too important to ignore,” Carter said.