Our campaign to keep patients SAFE

Learn more about DTUK’s Mouth cancer campaign and help save lives. This month, we look at the dentist’s role in cancer treatment

The referral

As a dentist, you play a pivotal role in increasing awareness of mouth cancers and identifying and appropriately referring early stage mouth cancers. Referrals can be stressful—for the patient, for you and for your nurse—so it will help to have a procedure worked out in advance. Patients may already have suspicions about the possibility of an abnormality in their mouth being a cancer or ‘nasty’.

The skill in patient counselling lies in allowing the patient to express his or her fears and concerns in a controlled way, by asking them what they think it may be. Where you have genuine concerns about a lesion being malignant or potentially malignant, this information should be communicated to the patient but until a formal histological diagnosis is available, no absolute information should be given to the patient, and you would like you to see a specialist. ‘I don’t think we can jump to any conclusions at this stage, because many different conditions occur within the mouth. That’s why seeing a specialist is so important.’

You can prepare a patient for possibly ‘bad news’ by using phrases such as: ‘I have some concerns about what I can see in your mouth. However, I am not completely sure what is going on and I think we should wait and see how things develop and then get further advice and a formal histological diagnosis.’

Nurturing your patients

Do encourage your patient to return to the dental practice for further discussion and support if they feel the need. The patient should not feel that they are being sent away ‘into the unknown’ without any support mechanisms in place. It is important not to burden your worried patient with guilt about using tobacco and/or alcohol but focus on getting as early a diagnosis as possible.

...}

null