Mouth cancer ignorance continues

A facial surgery research charity has announced a survey results that some dental practice staff are still not adequately informed about the signs of mouth cancer, thereby ‘delaying treatment and resulting in ‘invasive and disfiguring surgery for thousands.

The telephone survey conducted by The Facial Surgery Research Foundation, (FSBF) Saving Faces, looked at responses from 444 dental practices in London. Lack of knowledge on oral cancer was revealed to be the case, even when a patient rang a surgery with clear symptoms. The survey showed that in 45 per cent of cases, patients with suspicious symptoms were not offered an appointment within one week. In eight per cent of cases, patients were told they had to wait between three weeks and four months. In a further seven per cent, patients were told they could not be seen at all, because the surgery had met its NHS quota.

The survey revealed that the majority of calls were taken by receptionists who did not recognise the symptoms of mouth cancer, even though patients informed them they had suffered from tongue ulcers which had not healed for more than four weeks, despite self-medication with over the counter remedies.

Oral and maxilla-facial surgeon, Professor Iain Hutchinson, the CEO of Saving Faces, said: “Increased focus on the symptoms of mouth cancer has certainly improved awareness amongst dentists, but the first person a patient speaks to is usually a receptionist. The study reveals these people often do not recognise even obviously risky cases.”

“We see thousands of patients who are only referred to us when their mouth cancer is at an advanced stage.”

ProfiHutchinson added: ‘Much more needs to be done to train receptionists, because they are the first point of contact with the treatment of patients have a role to play in protecting them from harm and providing a safe and effective standard of care. Patients should be made aware of relevant facts, which may have an effect on their treatment and the management of any complaint. We are keen to hear from all GDC registrants, as well as professional associations, patients and patient groups, which could all be affected by these standards.’

The consultation period closes at 5pm on Tuesday, November 11. For more information log onto: www.gdc-uk.org. Responses to the proposals should be sent to the consultation@gdc-uk.org.

Ethics conference

A conference on Legal, Ethical and Clinical Issues in Dentistry, is taking place in London. The event, on October 9th, at Woburn House, is organised by the patient safety charity Action Against Medical Accidents (AVMA), and is run in association with the General Dental Council. The conference will examine the impact on dentists and patients of recent reforms and will also tackle the medico-legal issues facing dentistry. In addition, it will look at how to improve patient safety and learn from mistakes to ensure a safer workplace. For more details, email: conferences@avma.org.uk