Action on mouth cancer
Lordly launch of annual oral cancer campaign encourages practitioners and patients ‘if in doubt, get checked out’

Following the success of last year’s campaign, Mouth Cancer Action Month officially began 1st November at the Houses of Parliament. Organised by the British Dental Health Foundation (BDHF) in association with partners such as Denplan and Smile-on, the event was a great success, with many areas of the profession and trade present to help generate awareness of the disease.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the BDHF, opened the event. He stressed the importance of early detection and warning signs. Dr Carter spoke largely of the success of last year’s campaign and his hopes for this year’s Action Month.

Following him, BDHF president Daniel Davis welcomed the assembled guests and gave context as to why the campaign is so important, with one person every five hours dying in the UK from the condition. Subject matter experts were led by Prof Crispian Scully and the initiative was spearheaded by Prof Stephen Lambert-Humble. Other speakers at the event included Denplan’s Henry Glover and Smile-on’s Noam Tamir. Noam officially launched a new educational resource, Oral Cancer: Prevention, Examination, Referral, which has been developed by Smile-on in conjunction with K&D Deaneey, BDHF and Dental Protection as well as Deputy CDO Sue Gregory.

Noam said: “If we save the life of only two people per year in the UK we would feel that all this effort was worth our while. I do believe that we can save the lives of thousands of people”.

Finally, Dr David Conway took centre stage to conclude the formal part of the event with the results of some significant research carried out by Glasgow University. The research findings were very sobering and struck a chord with everyone in the room. Covering the study of class, gender, diet and education, Dr Conway covered a range of mouth cancer risk factors and his ending quote from George Orwell’s The Road to Wigan Pier on inequality encapsulated his research.

The reason behind the campaign is a simple one: early detection saves lives. It is hoped that throughout the month dentists and patients will work together to help raise awareness of mouth cancer. Health professionals can play a vital role in detecting mouth cancer in patients, and although the thought of referring a patient who has a consistent ulcer or red patches to hospital may seem daunting, it’s better to be safe than sorry.

“The mouth is easier to treat if caught early on, and survival rates also improve massively with early detection,” Dr Nigel Carter said.

The call to action reflects the importance of early detection. 9 in 10 people survive mouth cancer caught early on, however, the five year survival rate remains as low as 50 per cent.

The campaign will focus on raising awareness of mouth cancer among the public, and will point out the significance of self-examination. Educating people on the early warning signs of the disease, the common risk factors, self-examination, and the importance of regular screenings, will save lives.

You and your practice can take part in Mouth Cancer Action Month: with the Blue Ribbon Badge Appeal, posters, fundraising, and press releases throughout the month, raising awareness couldn’t be easier. See the full story on pages 10 – 11 for more information.

Dr Nigel Carter of the BDHF