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Links between oral and general health: The mouth as early warning system

By integrating oral health into strategies for promoting general health and by assessing oral needs in socio-dental ways, health planners can greatly enhance both general and oral health. The key concept underlying future oral health strategies is integration with this approach, a major benefit being the focus on improving health conditions in general for the whole population and for groups at high risk, thereby reducing social inequities. Problems in the mouth can signal trouble in other parts of the body. AIDS and osteoporosis are examples. Mouth lesions and other oral conditions may be the first sign of HIV infection and are used to determine the stage of infection and to follow its progression to AIDS. The human mouth is home to millions of microorganisms, most of them harmless. Under certain conditions, however, some can cause oral infections such as tooth decay or gum disease. Oral bacteria may also enter the bloodstream if normal protective barriers in the mouth are breached. This can happen because of dental treatment or even tooth brushing and flossing. Recent studies point to associations between oral infections, primarily gum infections and diabetes; heart disease; stroke and preterm, low-weight births, etc. Research is under way to determine if the associations are causal or coincidental. Gum infections have been called the sixth complication of diabetes, because people with diabetes are more likely to have periodontal disease. Researchers are exploring a possible two-way connection between the conditions to see if treating gum disease improves diabetic control. Recent studies point to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke in people with gum infections; the risk increases with the severity of the oral infection. Some studies have found that mothers of preterm, low birth weight infants tend to have more severe gum disease than mothers of normal birth weight babies. More research is needed to determine if gum infections do indeed contribute to babies being born too soon and too small. Among tobacco users, oral cancer is a significant concern. Survival and treatment outcomes depend largely on stage of diagnosis. Early detection has the potential to improve the prognosis and quality of life for those diagnosed with oral cancer. Oral cancer statistics show that less than 40% of oral cancer cases are diagnosed at an early stage. Several conditions of the oral mucosa may present as white patches. Although most white patches are of little significance, certain lesions are associated with pre-malignancy or malignancy. Unfortunately, the presence of any sinister lesion cannot be assessed by clinical appearance alone and definitive diagnosis, involving a biopsy, is mandatory whenever there is uncertainty about the clinical diagnosis of an oral white patch

Biography

Arup Ratan Choudhury has obtained his BDS from Dhaka University, Bangladesh; FDSRCS (England), Fellowship in Dental Surgery, Royal College of Surgeons, England-2012 and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Dhaka University, Bangladesh. He is presently a Professor and Honorary Senior Consultant, BIRDEM Hospital and has specialization in: General dentistry and treatment for immunosuppressive medically compromised patient's systemic disease related to oral disease; prevention of oro-dental diseases and dental health education related to drug abuse and smoking; research work-mainly on diabetes & oral disease and nutrition; dental disease especially periodontal disease and white lesions in diabetes, etc.

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