



ORAL SURGERY

ORAL MEDICINE

ORAL PATHOLOGY

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*EDITORIAL*


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## The American Dental Association's Oral Cancer Campaign— An Opportunity to Make a Difference

The American Dental Association (ADA) and its leadership are to be congratulated for drawing the attention of the dental profession and the public to the challenge of oral cancer, a disease that, as stated in the ADA November news release, “kills one American every hour.” Through this and other media, the ADA has emphasized the importance of prevention, early detection, and effective management in prolonging life. These are goals that occupy high priority among the readership of this Journal and the affiliated specialty organizations. The content of this Journal confirms that interest.

There are several important areas in which the readership and, in particular, specialty and other dental professional organizations can make constructive contributions toward achieving these goals. In this and subsequent editorials I will attempt to delineate opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the profession in prevention, early detection, and management of oral cancer and premalignant disease.

Recent ADA publications, including those appearing in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* supplement “Combating Oral Cancer,”<sup>1</sup> have called attention to the need for professional and public education about oral cancer. Current knowledge levels in both groups are described as woefully inadequate—this despite the numerous publications and programs targeting this subject and the professional organizations and individuals (read: us) who have labored to make this information widely available to all interested groups. To date there is little evidence to suggest that the accessibility and extensive depth of Web-based information has ameliorated this situation. New—and more importantly, effective—approaches are needed, based, in essence, on a reconceptualization of the purposes and goals of dental professional organizations.

A strategy that I believe could be highly effective in disseminating information on oral cancer would be to

develop and provide professional and public education about oral cancer as a component of annual regional and national professional dental meetings. Consultation of the ADA Web site discloses 132 state, regional, and national dental professional meetings scheduled for 2002, with wide geographic distribution. Scores of these meetings involve dental professional organizations with significant interest in oral cancer diagnosis and management. Frequently, such meetings bring individuals with nationally recognized expertise in oral cancer into the local community. Many of these communities are at significant distance from medical centers and schools and colleges of dentistry, and thus have relatively limited access to the level of professional expertise attracted by these meetings. Virtually all of these meetings involve dental professionals capable of providing valuable information to the public. Unfortunately, it is the usual pattern that regional and national dental professional meetings are, from the standpoint of the local professional community and public, “closed affairs.” There is generally little exchange of information with local groups. From the standpoint of the professional goals and objectives of the organization holding the meeting, geographic location is relevant only insofar as it determines meeting expense, travel arrangements, and opportunities for recreation and dining.

I believe that this should change. I believe that a community hosting a dental professional meeting should derive more than the transitory benefits of increased economic activity; such professional meetings represent an important opportunity to share valuable and possibly life-saving information with individuals and groups external to the organization. Indeed, it would be through such a broadening of the goals of these meetings that the expense and time for travel and for convention activities might be more fully justified.

Professional groups are, for the most part, held in high respect by the public. Consider how that respect

may accrue in substance when the visiting professional organization extends itself to meet the educational needs of the community hosting the convention. I cannot help but believe that the impact of these educational experiences will be enhanced because of the direct involvement of dental specialty and professional organizations.

Therefore, these meetings can provide a new venue for the sharing of knowledge. Respective planning committees of professional dental organizations are encouraged to “think outside the box” in developing future meeting agendas. With each professional meeting there is the opportunity to publicize the event locally; to publish letters and other information pertaining to oral cancer in local newspapers; to collaborate with local dental groups in developing and providing professional education in oral cancer; and to make appropriate aspects of this information available to the general citizenry of the convention/meeting city

through effective public forums and other innovative educational settings. In this way attracting a professional dental meeting becomes more than merely an issue of enhancing the local economy of the convention city, but a strategy for advancing the competence of the local dental community, the knowledge base of the public, and the public health.

To those organizations already serving the public in this manner, you are to be commended. For those not active in this domain, consider the opportunities herein for service to the profession, the public, and the nation.

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#### REFERENCE

1. Combating oral cancer. The dentist's role in preventing, detecting a deadly disease. *J Am Dent Assoc* 2001;132:1S-48S. doi:10.1067/moe.2002.124794