Exploring the Impact of Public Health Measures in Prevention and Control of Oral Cancer

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DEAR EDITOR,

Oral cancer is a significant cause of public health concern in both developing and developed nations. Global estimates reveal that incidence of oral cancer varies from 1 to 10 cases per 100,000 people in most countries. It is ranked as the eleventh most common cancer worldwide, accounting for 130,000 deaths every year. Almost 50% of oral cancer patients present to the health centers in advanced stage of the disease. An inequitable geographical distribution of the oral cancer has been observed due to the regional differences in prevalence of disease-specific risk factors, accessibility and availability of screening/diagnostic measures, socio-economic factors and demographic parameters of the population.

Multiple socio-demographic and habit related risk factors such as male gender, older people, poor education status and socio-economic class, smoked/non-smoked forms of tobacco, alcohol, human papilloma virus infection, oral sex, and genetic susceptibility have been attributed in the causation of oral cancer. In the global campaign to minimize the burden of oral cancer, diversified challenges such as low awareness among people, poor knowledge among doctors, diagnosis in advanced stages, unaffordable treatment modalities, poor utilization of mass-media, inaccessibility to health centers/trained health professionals and dilemma associated with screening methods have been encountered. These barriers have restricted the scope of public health benefit to a great extent as sooner the patient realizes the lesion and comes for treatment; better are the chances of survival.

To ensure early detection of oral cancer measures such as mass screening or screening of high-risk group population, reducing the delay from patients’ side by creating awareness about signs/symptoms of oral cancer, involvement of community members and reducing the delay from doctors’ side by training health professionals to have a high index of suspicion in high-risk groups and routine oral screening during health check-ups should be strategically formulated and implemented.

Large scale studies should be planned for obtaining the epidemiological data regarding the distribution, potential risk-factors and barriers that have limited the utilization of health-care services. Based on the study findings, measures should be directed against the risk-factors and the identified barriers for minimizing the morbidity.
and mortality associated with oral cancer.\textsuperscript{[1,4,7]} For designing public health solutions, best results will be obtained when oral health screening services are integrated with other national health programs.\textsuperscript{[1]} Sustained political commitment is an indispensable component in building effective oral health policies; establishing linkage with the technical support agencies/international organizations/non-governmental organizations; for ensuring the mandatory display of pictorial warning and messages on tobacco products; and for the implementation of community-based screening projects for facilitating early detection of oral cancer.\textsuperscript{[1,3,4]} Further, expansion of diagnostic aids and adoption of newer modes of treatment can also be looked upon as the potential solutions to counter the problem of oral cancer.\textsuperscript{[1,2,4]}

To conclude, the need of the hour is to develop evidence-based strategies focusing on primary prevention, health education strategies for the community, early detection through screening methods and initiation of appropriate treatment at the earliest.

**REFERENCES**


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