

Raising Awareness and Promoting of Early Detection on Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancer

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Perspective

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Oral and oropharyngeal cancers, often overshadowed by their more well-known counterparts, are stealthy adversaries that demand our attention. These malignancies, affecting the mouth and throat, may not make headlines, but they are on the rise and pose a significant threat to public health. In this article, we'll delve into the world of oral and oropharyngeal cancer, shedding light on their challenges and emphasizing the importance of awareness and early detection.

The silent rise

Oral and oropharyngeal cancers encompass a range of malignancies that develop in the tissues of the mouth and throat. While they may not be as common as some other cancers, their incidence is on the rise. This upward trend is particularly concerning because these cancers often go unnoticed until they have reached an advanced stage, making treatment more challenging and reducing survival rates.

The risk factors

Several risk factors contribute to the development of oral and oropharyngeal cancers, and some of them are modifiable

Tobacco and alcohol use: Smoking and heavy alcohol consumption are among the most significant risk factors. Those who both smoke and drink excessively are at an even higher risk.

Human papillomavirus (HPV): Certain strains of HPV are associated with an increased risk of oropharyngeal cancer. HPV vaccination can reduce this risk.

Diet and nutrition: A diet low in fruits and vegetables may elevate the risk. The consumption of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can offer protective benefits.

Sun exposure: Prolonged sun exposure to the lips increases the risk of lip cancer. Sunscreen and lip balm can provide protection.

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Age and gender: Oral and oropharyngeal cancers are more common in older adults, and men are at a higher risk than women.

Poor oral hygiene: Neglecting oral health can contribute to the development of these cancers. Regular dental check-ups are crucial.

The importance of early detection

One of the challenges of oral and oropharyngeal cancers is that they can develop without obvious symptoms in their early stages. As a result, they are often not diagnosed until they have advanced, making treatment more complex and less effective. Therefore, early detection is paramount.

Regular dental check-ups play a crucial role in early detection. Dentists and dental hygienists are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of oral cancers. Any suspicious lesions or changes in the mouth or throat should be promptly evaluated. Public awareness campaigns can also help individuals recognize potential warning signs, such as persistent mouth sores, hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, or changes in the appearance of the oral cavity.

Treatment challenges

When oral and oropharyngeal cancers are detected at an advanced stage, treatment options become more limited and may involve aggressive interventions like surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. These treatments can have significant side effects, impacting patients' quality of life.

The role of prevention

Preventing oral and oropharyngeal cancers begins with reducing risk factors:

Tobacco and alcohol: Quitting smoking and limiting alcohol consumption significantly reduce the risk of these cancers.

HPV vaccination: Vaccination against HPV is effective in preventing HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers.

Healthy diet: A balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables can bolster the body's defences against cancer.

Sun protection: Protecting the lips from sun exposure with lip balm and sunscreen can reduce the risk of lip cancer.

The path forward

To combat the rising incidence of oral and oropharyngeal cancers, we must prioritize awareness, prevention, and early detection. Public health campaigns should emphasize the importance of regular dental check-ups, recognizing potential symptoms, and adopting healthy lifestyles.

Healthcare providers must also be vigilant in educating their patients about risk factors and screening for signs of oral and oropharyngeal cancers during routine examinations. Oral and oropharyngeal cancers may not always be in the limelight, but their impact on individuals and communities is undeniable. With a concerted effort to raise awareness, reduce risk factors, and prioritize early detection, we can make significant strides in combating these cancers. By shining a light on this often-overlooked public health concern, we can save lives and improve the overall well-being of individuals at risk of these malignancies.