Letter to Branches

For instant updates: http//:www.cwu.org email: info@cwu.org

150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London, SW19 1RX Tel: 020 8971 7200 Fax: 020 8971 7300

General Secretary: Billy Hayes (www.billyhayes.co.uk)

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| No. LTB769 | Ref P5/13 | Date: 20 November 2013 |

**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

# Mouth Cancer Action Month November 2013

**Help Raise Awareness!**

The Health, Safety and Environment Department is this year supporting Mouth Cancer Awareness month and a number of the leading campaigners to help raise awareness of the risks and symptoms of mouth cancer. A number of Charities, such as the Mouth Cancer Foundation and British Dental Health Foundation organise the annual Mouth Cancer Action Month campaign each November to encourage everyone to find out more about a disease which has increased by approaching 50 per cent in the last decade. The Mouth Cancer Foundation and British Dental Health Foundation are c**onstantly campaigning for early detection and to raise awareness of the risks and signs and symptoms of Mouth Cancer. Dental health professionals are the natural leaders to lead the fight against mouth cancer.**

The Charities estimate that over the next decade around 60,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with the disease. Without early detection an estimated 30,000 people will die. Worldwide, over 460,000 people are expected to die from mouth cancer each year by 2030 and the message to everyone is please take action – ‘**[If In Doubt, Get Checked Out](http://www.mouthcancer.org/page/if-in-doubt-get-checked-out)**’.

**What is Mouth Cancer Action Month?**

Mouth Cancer Action Month is a month-long campaign to raise awareness of a killer disease on the rise. The Campaign encourages everyone to follow our campaign message – "**I**[**f in doubt, get checked out**](http://www.mouthcancer.org/page/if-in-doubt-get-checked-out)**"**.

During the next decade it's estimated that around 60,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with the disease, and without early detection half will die. Worldwide, over 460,000 people are expected to die from mouth cancer each year by 2030.

Last year some significant strides were made in raising the profile of mouth cancer. Campaign messages reached more than 100 million people. Campaign Website visitors doubled in number and more than 1,000 Dental practices registered their details to help spread the word about the disease.

The Charities hope 2013 will be an even bigger year for raising the profile of this killer disease.

Mouth Cancer Action Month aims to improve the awareness of the [risk factors](http://www.mouthcancer.org/page/risk-factors) and signs and symptoms of the disease, as this is the only way of improving the survival rates of patients. Tobacco use, drinking alcohol to excess, the human papillomavirus (HPV) and poor diet are all risk factors for the disease.

The campaign is about taking action and to educate and inform people about the risks, the signs and what measures they can take to reduce their risk.

The professionals warn - 'Don’t leave that ulcer unattended for more than three weeks. Don’t ignore that unusual lump or swelling or red and white patches in your mouth. Early detection could save your life - so don’t rest – take action!'

# The UK's fastest growing cancer

Latest figures from Cancer Research UK show more than 6,500 people in the UK were diagnosed with mouth cancer last year – that’s 18 people every day. It is one of the few cancer variations on the rise – cases have increased by almost 50 per cent over the last decade – and it still claims more lives than cervical and testicular cancer combined.

# What are the risk factors?

* **Smoking**

     One in five people in the UK smoke, and the habit is still considered the leading cause of mouth cancer. Many people are aware of the damage that smoking does to their lungs, but not to their mouths. Smoking helps to transforms saliva into a deadly cocktail that damages cells in the mouth and can turn them cancerous. Around two thirds of smokers want to quit, so use the campaign to do just that.

* **Alcohol**

Drinking to excess can increase mouth cancer risks by four times. As alcohol aids the absorption of tobacco into the mouth, those who smoke and drink to excess are up to 30 times more likely to develop the disease.

* **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)**

The Human Papilloma virus, transmitted via oral sex, is increasingly being linked to mouth cancer. Younger people are particularly at risk. A recent study in the USA has connected over 20,000 mouth cancer cases to HPV in the last five years. Experts suggest it may rival tobacco and alcohol as a key risk factor within 10 years, although some research indicates that people with mouth cancer caused by HPV may have a greater chance of survival. People with multiple sexual partners are more at risk.

* **Poor diet**

Around half of cases are thought to be linked to an unhealthy diet. It is recommended that people eat a healthy, balanced diet high in anti-oxidants including five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Increasing evidence also suggests that Omega 3, found in foods such as eggs and fish can help lower risks, as can foods high in fibre such as nuts, seeds, whole-wheat pasta and brown rice.

* **Chewing or Smokeless tobacco**

Smokeless tobacco is normally defined as any tobacco product that is placed in the mouth or nose and not burned. Although some people believe this type of tobacco is safer than smoking, the reality is that it is much more dangerous. The types of smokeless tobacco products most used in the UK often contain a mix of ingredients including slaked lime, areca nut and spices, flavourings and sweeteners. The terminology for smokeless tobacco varies, but the main types used in the UK include: Gutka, Khaini, Pan Masala (betel quid), Shammah and Maras powder (these are sucked or chewed); Zarda, Qiwam, or Mawa (chewed); Lal dantmanjan, Gadakhu, Gul, Mishri, or Creamy Snuff (dental products which are used as toothpaste or rubbed on gums); Nass (can be used nasally, sucked or chewed). Smokeless tobacco is used particularly by South Asian Communities, especially women. The incidence of mouth cancer is significantly greater among South Asian women. Other parts of South Asian communities are also more at risk from the effects of smokeless tobacco including: people of Bangladeshi origin; those in older age groups; and people from lower socioeconomic groups.

# If in doubt get checked out

There are two things you need to remember about mouth cancer. Early detection saves lives, and if in doubt, get checked out. The reasons are simple. Mouth cancer cases are rising, and the five-year survival rate of mouth cancer patients is as low as 50 per cent. But early diagnosis gives sufferers a 90 per cent chance of survival. To make early detection possible, it’s really important you visit your dentist regularly. They are best

placed to spot anything that may need a closer look.

# The self examination

Mouth cancer can strike in a number of places, including the lips, tongue, gums and cheek. Given early detection is so crucial with mouth cancer, it’s vitally important everyone knows the signs and symptoms. These include:

* Ulcers that do not heal within three weeks
* Red and white patches in the mouth
* Unusual lumps or swellings in the mouth

If you notice any of these things, then make an appointment with your GP or Dentist as soon as possible. The message is simple – **"if in doubt, get checked out!"**

**Seven Steps to Safety and Early Detection**

By following these seven steps to safety, early detection is made all the more possible:

1. **Head and Neck**

Look at your face and neck.  Do both sides look the same?  Look for any lumps, bumps or swellings that are only on one side of the face.

1. **Neck**

Feel and press along the sides and front of your neck. Can you feel any tenderness or lumps?

1. **Lips**

Pull down your lower lip and look inside for any sores or change in colour.  Next, use your thumb and forefinger to feel the lip for lumps, bumps or changes in texture.  Repeat this on the upper lip.

1. **Cheek**

Use your finger to pull out the cheek so that you can see inside. Look for red, white or dark patches.  Put your index finger inside your cheek and your thumb on the outside.  Gently squeeze and roll the cheek to check for any lumps, tenderness or ulcers. Repeat on the other cheek.

1. **Roof of the Mouth**

Tilt back your head and open your mouth wide to see if there are any lumps or if there is any change in colour.  Run your ﬁnger on the roof of the mouth to feel for any lumps.

1. **Tongue**

Stick out your tongue and look at the surface for any changes in colour or texture.  Gently pull out the tongue and look at one side first, then the other side.  Look for any swelling, change in colour or ulcers.  Examine the underside of the tongue by placing the tip of your tongue on the roof of the mouth.

1. **Floor of the mouth**

Look at the floor of the mouth for changes in colour that are different than normal.   Gently press your finger along the floor of the mouth and underside of the tongue to feel for any lumps, swellings or ulcers.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on everything you need to know about mouth cancer:**

* **What is mouth cancer?**

Most people have heard of cancer affecting parts of the body such as the lungs or breasts. However, cancer can occur in the mouth, where the disease can affect the lips, tongue, cheeks and throat.

* **Who can be affected by mouth cancer?**

Anyone can be affected by mouth cancer, whether they have their own teeth or not.  Mouth cancers are more common in people over 40, particularly men. However, research has shown that mouth cancer is becoming more common in younger patients and in women.  There are, on average, almost 6,000 new cases of mouth cancer diagnosed in the UK each year.  The number of new cases of mouth cancer is on the increase.

* **Do people die from mouth cancer?**

Yes. Over 1,800 people in the UK die from mouth cancer every year.  Many of these deaths could be prevented if the cancer was caught early enough. As it is, people with mouth cancer are more likely to die than those having cervical cancer or melanoma skin cancer.

* **What can cause mouth cancer?**

Most cases of mouth cancer are linked to [tobacco and alcohol](http://www.mouthcancer.org/page/risk-factors).  Cigarette, cigar and pipe smoking are the main forms of tobacco use in the UK. However, the traditional ethnic habits of chewing tobacco, betel quid, gutkha and paan are particularly dangerous.  Alcohol increases the risk of mouth cancer, and reports have linked mouth cancer to the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the major cause of cervical cancer and affects the skin that lines the moist areas of the body. HPV can be spread through oral sex, and research now suggests that it could soon rival smoking and drinking as one of the main causes of mouth cancer.  Practicing safe sex and limiting the number of partners you have may help reduce your chances of contracting HPV.

* **What are the signs of mouth cancer?**

Mouth cancer can appear in different forms and can affect all parts of the mouth, tongue and lips. Mouth cancer can appear as a painless mouth ulcer that does not heal normally. A white or red patch in the mouth can also develop into a cancer. It is important to visit your dentist if these areas do not heal within three weeks.

* **How can mouth cancer be detected early?**

Mouth cancer can often be spotted in its early stages by your dentist during a thorough mouth examination. If mouth cancer is recognised early, then the chances of a cure are good.  Many people with mouth cancer go to their dentist or doctor too late.

* **What is involved in a full check-up of the mouth?**

The dentist examines the inside of your mouth and your tongue with the help of a small mirror. Remember, your dentist is able to see parts of your mouth that you cannot see easily yourself.

* **What happens if my dentist finds a problem?**

If your dentist finds something unusual they will refer you to a consultant at the local hospital, who will carry out a thorough examination of your mouth and throat. A small sample of the cells may be gathered from the area (a biopsy), and these cells will be examined under the microscope to see what is wrong.

* **What happens next?**

If the cells are cancerous, more tests will be carried out.  These may include overall health checks, blood tests, x-rays or scans. These tests will decide what course of treatment is needed.

* **Can mouth cancer be cured?**

If mouth cancer is spotted early, the chances of a complete cure are good, and the smaller the area or ulcer the better the chance of a cure. However, too many people come forward too late. Visit your Dentist or Doctor at once if you notice any abnormal problems or are not sure - visit the dentist for regular examinations.

* **How can I make sure that my mouth stays healthy?**

It is important to visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend, even if you wear dentures.  This is especially important if you smoke and drink alcohol.

When brushing your teeth, look out for any changes in your mouth, and report any red or white patches, or ulcers, that have not cleared up within three weeks. When exposed to the sun, be sure to use a good protective sun cream, and put the correct type of barrier cream on your lips. A good diet, rich in vitamins A, C and E, provides protection against the development of mouth cancer. Plenty of fruit and vegetables help the body to protect itself, in general, from most cancers. Cut down on your smoking and drinking.

**Mouth cancer causes more deaths per number of cases than breast cancer, cervical cancer or melanomas.**

* There was a 50% increase in incidence between 1999 and 2007.
* In the UK there were 7,556 cases of mouth, throat and head & neck cancers in 2003.
* Despite treatment, there were 2,718 deaths in 2005 - that's approximately one death every three hours from mouth, throat or head and neck cancers.
* Figures in 2010 from Cancer Research UK show that more than 6,500 new oral cancer cases alone are diagnosed in the UK, with one person dying every five hours from the disease.
* Due to late detection the mortality rate from these cancers is just over 50 per cent despite treatment.
* The ratio is 2:1 men to women.
* 87% cases occur in the over 50 age group.
* Mouth cancers are becoming much more common in younger people.

**THE CHANCE OF SURVIVAL IS GREATLY IMPROVED IF THE CANCERS ARE DETECTED EARLY AND TREATED RAPIDLY.**

Without early detection it is estimated that over the next decade around 60,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with the disease and around 30,000 people will die.

Worldwide, over 460,000 people are expected to die from mouth cancer each year by 2030. Mouth cancer patients suffer greatly owing to disabilities such as facial deformity,

loss of teeth and damage to the tongue and throat, with consequent difficulty in talking and eating in public places. Yet they do not receive the attention and support that

other cancer sufferers do.

[**Leaflets and Posters**](http://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org/get-info/merchandise)

See attached a Campaign Poster and three Leaflets as pdf file copies. Hard copies of the Leaflets and Posters can be ordered from the Mouth Cancer Foundation.

**Contact Details**

**The Mouth Cancer Foundation**

C/O Media Ambitions (Enterprises) Limited,

Top Floor,

1 Victoria Parade,

Sandycombe Road,

Kew,

Richmond,

Surrey TW9 3NB

Tel: 020 8940 2222

MCF Helpline - **01924 950 950**

Website: [www.mouthcancer.org/](http://www.mouthcancer.org/)

**Dental Health Foundation**

Smile House

2 East Union Street

Rugby

Warwickshire

CV22 6AJ

Tel: 01788 546 365

Email: [mail@dentalhealth.org](mailto:pr@dentalhealth.org)

Website: [www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org/page/www.dentalhealth.org)

Yours Sincerely

**Dave Joyce**

National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

