Public Awareness of Mouth, Head and Neck Cancer

Abstract:

Sir

We read with great interest the recent article on Public Awareness of Head and Neck Cancer by O'Connor, Papanikolaou & Keogh (2010) 1. Firstly, we would like to commend the authors for highlighting this important issue. The low public awareness of HNC and its associated risk factors continues to hamper efforts to reduce the morbidity and mortality of this disease both nationally and internationally. Secondly, we would like to inform readers of the recent establishment of Mouth, Head & Neck Cancer (MHNC) Awareness Ireland.

This group aims to increase public and professional awareness of MHNC. It began when individuals who had experienced the shock of being diagnosed with a cancer they had never even heard of (MHNC) approached health care professionals about setting up an awareness campaign in Ireland. Following a positive response to those initial discussions, the group grew quickly and now includes survivors, carers and health care professionals who seek to highlight the plight of those affected by this relatively unknown condition. To date, the group has focused on the production of a patient information leaflet and have been supported by the Dental Health Foundation and the Irish Cancer Society in this endeavour. This leaflet has now been produced, following valuable input from MHNC survivors, carers, and members of the MHNC multi-disciplinary Teams in Dublin and Cork.

On 29th September 2010, the group organised a MHNC Awareness Day. As part of this event, Cork University Dental School & Hospital and Dublin Dental University Hospital offered a free Mouth Cancer examination to all adults who attended on that day. Information on known risk factors, self examination and advice on behaviour modification were also available. The event was well covered in the media and generated much interest. In the region of 4000 people attended for a mouth cancer check-up in the Cork and Dublin Dental Schools. Staff and students in both dental schools worked tirelessly to examine and advise everyone who attended.

MHNC Awareness Ireland aims to encourage closer collaboration between patients, carers, dental, medical and related health care professionals to increase public awareness of MHNC. We hope to reverse the current trend of late presentation of this disease and thereby ensure early diagnosis and treatment.

Acknowledgements

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