

Knowledge, Attitude and Practices regarding Oral Cancer

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Abstract

Oral cancer continues to burden the clinical and economic dimensions of health care around the world. In India, oral cancers constitute 40% of all cancers and rank as the most common cancer in men and third most common cancer in women. Recently, a trend has been observed towards increasing incidence of oral cancer among young adults. In this study we assessed Knowledge, attitude and practices regarding oral cancer among first year medical college students in Delhi, India. In addition, the relationship between socio-economic-demographics and oral hygiene was examined. **Materials and methods** This was a cross-sectional study among 200 First year medical college students in Delhi. Students were given a self-administered questionnaire, which was pre-tested, after getting a written informed consent. Data were entered in SPSS-17 version. 'p' value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. **Results** Two hundred students, 117 males (58.5%) and 83 females (41.5%) participated. The mean age was 19.5±0.05SD years (Range: 17-22 years). Majority (75%) knew oral cancer to be the commonest in India, followed by lung cancer (13.5%). 95% students responded that they knew about the risk factors for oral cancer, viz. smoking (89%), tobacco chewing (99%), alcohol intake (43%), poor oral hygiene (56%), family history (53%), recurrent oral ulcers (60%). The pre-malignant lesions were known to 23% students. Awareness about symptoms of oral cancer was: bleeding/recurrent oral ulcer (85%), painful lesions in mouth (26%), loose teeth (4%), difficulty in mouth opening (4%), dysphagia (9%) and weight loss (2%). 82% respondents visited a dentist (55% for regular check-up and 45% for other dental problems). Relatives of 6 study subjects (3%) suffered from oral cancer in the past for

which all of them underwent treatment. Only 55% respondents perceived their oral hygiene to be good/excellent and 64% were doing self oral examination. Around 92.5% subjects strongly disagreed to the statement "White patch in the mouth should be ignored". 22% of the respondents consumed tobacco in some form (65.1% consumed in the form of hookah, followed by cigarette 28%). 17.5% study subjects reported to have ever consumed alcohol. Tobacco consumption was higher among males, i.e. 34/117 (29%) as compared to females, i.e. 9/83 (10.8%) ('p' = 0.002), and 27/117 (23%) males as compared to 8/83 (9.6%) females consumed alcohol ('p' = 0.03). Families with less than 5 members brushed more than once a day (52.8%) as compared to families with 5 or more members (45.5%) ('p' = 0.021). Families with per capita income more than Rs. 30,001 brushed more than once a day (75.7%) as compared to the families with per capita income less than Rs. 30,000 (45.3%) ('p' = 0.029). Awareness about risk factors for oral cancer was higher among Females (33.7%), as compared to Males (15.4%) ('p' = 0.02), and 100% Females as compared to Males (94%) were aware about pre-cancerous lesions of oral cavity ('p' = 0.02). **Conclusion** Majority of the medical students were aware about oral cancer (75%), signs and symptoms (49%), risk factor (95%), pre-malignant lesions (23%). Of the respondents, 22% have ever smoked, 17.5% have ever consumed alcohol and 63.5% were doing oral self examination. Families with a higher income pay more attention to oral hygiene. The study suggests the need for focussing on reduction of tobacco and alcohol consumption, and encourage oral self examination among study subjects. It will be important to achieve this in this study group who will be later involved in health care and education of oral cancer in the general population.