

# The Oral-Systemic Link: Dentists have a responsibility to inform their patients

Although there have been many advancements in dental treatment, oral infection is an area that requires more focus. It is now estimated that 75% of the North American population has periodontal disease and about 15% of these individuals have severe periodontitis. Since periodontal pathogens are easily transmitted, the number of infected individuals will increase unless treatment becomes more effective. Unfortunately, not only do bleeding tissues and loss of teeth have a serious psychological and physical impact on the individual but evidence is accumulating that periodontal disease also has a serious impact on systemic health.

A connection between periodontal disease and systemic health was first described 120 years ago by Dr. Willoughby Miller, who wrote that the mouth was a "focus of infection where microorganisms or their waste products obtain entrance to parts of the body adjacent to or remote from the mouth". Considerable evidence is now emerging that supports this relationship between periodontal disease, inflammation and many systemic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular problems, rheumatoid arthritis, and low birth weight babies. Hyperlipidemia and Alzheimer's disease are two other conditions on this list. Osteoporosis and periodontal disease

share a common factor, bone loss initiated through chronic inflammation.

These systemic diseases are linked to the inflammatory response and the production of inflammatory mediators that result from periodontal infection.

The serious systemic health effects of oral infection were addressed very clearly by the editors of the American Journal of Cardiology and the Journal of Periodontology in 2009. They published a series of statements recommending that the medical and dental professions work closely together to decrease the impact of periodontal disease for those patients with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease. They stated that the dentist has the responsibility to inform patients who have moderate to severe periodontal disease that they may be at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease.

Keeping oral tissues disease-free will help the diabetic stabilize glycemic index and reduce complications. Periodontitis has also been linked to pre-diabetes and insulin resistance. Nosocomial pneumonia, a common cause of death in elderly patients, has been attributed to pathogens from the oral cavity. Statistics show that by keeping the oral cavity of these patients even marginally clean by brushing, one in ten lives will be saved.

We can reduce mortality from pneumonia,

decrease the risk for Alzheimer's disease, and increase the life expectancy of the individual by treating periodontal infections.

We know that the mouth can be a source of chronic but silent infection and that dental cleanings alone will not eliminate the source. Treatment requires a paradigm shift in the treatment of this disease. A periodontal diagnosis is most often based on clinical signs and symptoms. Studies show that microbiological tests taken on an ongoing basis, can determine the risk of disease progression, making it a useful predictor of recurrence of disease even before clinical manifestations are apparent.

Your patients need to know there is a relationship between their general and dental health. A successful practice requires a comprehensive patient information system to help patients recognize the seriousness of the oral condition and to accept treatment. The dental team has the responsibility to reinforce health and wellness awareness to their patients. Remember, a healthy mouth leads to a healthy body.

## **Anne Bosy.**

*Anne Bosy is the creator of the Oravital System. Formerly a professor at George Brown College and Regency Dental Hygiene Academy, she is currently the Senior Vice President and founding partner of Oravital Inc.*

## Goings on at the Executive Meeting

We had our last meeting on January 11, 2011. There was a respectable turnout considering it was in the middle of a snowstorm. Larry Rotman, Alan Vinegar and Andrea Heckler reported on International Convention. We talked about the new initiatives AO International has for fundraising, and the new direction it is going in. I'm sure there is a full report in this AORTA so I won't be redundant.

I do have to mention that Andrea Heckler was voted to International as the 'Young Director', a new position for the fraternity, its goal is to bring younger members and families into the fraternity. Congratulations!

We talked about all the great upcoming events – skating night, Theatre night, Half Day Seminar to name a few. You all should have received your purchase program packages by now. The

prices on some items may be a bit higher than last year due to the 8% increase in tax. Remember the prices of all the items include tax and delivery.

We also discussed the website and how Scotiabank is sponsoring a good portion of it. The membership section is almost up and running and we will all get our passwords soon. All the upcoming programs are listed on it as well. It is looking fantastic but is still a work in progress.

That's about all for now. Our next meeting will be on March 7 and hopefully the snow will be gone by then. See you all at the Ice Fishing program on Sunday Feb. 27 on Lake Simcoe. Bring your gutkes!!

**Bonnie Chandler** - Secretary ...next meeting is on March 7