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Links between oral and general health: Current concepts

By integrating oral health into strategies for promoting general health and by assessing oral needs in socio-dental ways, health planners can greatly enhance both general and oral health. The key concept underlying future oral health strategies is integration with this approach, a major benefit being the focus on improving health conditions in general for the whole population and for groups at high risk, thereby reducing social inequities. Problems in the mouth can signal trouble in other parts of the body. AIDS and osteoporosis are examples. Mouth lesions and other oral conditions may be the first sign of HIV infection, and are used to determine the stage of infection and to follow its progression to AIDS. The human mouth is home to millions of microorganisms, most of them harmless. Under certain conditions, however, some can cause oral infections such as tooth decay or gum disease. Oral bacteria may also enter the bloodstream if normal protective barriers in the mouth are breached. This can happen as a result of dental treatment or even tooth brushing and flossing. Recent studies point to associations between oral infections – primarily gum infections – and diabetes; heart disease; stroke; and preterm, low-weight births. Research is under way to determine if the associations are causal or coincidental. Gum infections have been called "the sixth complication of diabetes," because people with diabetes are more likely to have periodontal disease. Researchers are exploring a possible two-way connection between the conditions to see if treating gum disease improve diabetic control. Recent studies point to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke in people with gum infections; the risk increases with the severity of the oral infection. Some studies have found that mothers of preterm, low birth weight infants tend to have more severe gum disease than mothers of normal birth weight babies. More research is needed to determine if gum infections do indeed contribute to babies being born too soon and too small. Among tobacco users, oral cancer is a significant concern. Survival and treatment outcomes depend largely on stage of diagnosis. Early detection has the potential to improve the prognosis and quality of life for those diagnosed with oral cancer. Oral cancer statistics show that less than 40 percent of oral cancer cases are diagnosed at an early stage. A number of conditions of the oral mucosa may present as white patches. Although the majority of white patches are of little significance, certain lesions are associated with pre-malignancy or malignancy. Unfortunately, the presence of any sinister lesion cannot be assessed by clinical appearance alone and definitive diagnosis, involving a biopsy, is mandatory whenever there is uncertainty about the clinical diagnosis of an oral white patch.

Biography

Dr Arup Ratan Choudhury is an exception achiever, specialist dental surgeon, humanist, media compare as well as a noted singer of Bangladesh. Who has devoted his life to the service of mankind, was born in 1952. He has shown a remarkable contribution in management of medically compromised patients and scientific research during the last 25 years. As a scientist-cum singer, Dr Arup Ratan Choudhury splits his time in the USA between studying periodontal disease in Diabetics and singing the works of famed Bengali author and Nobel poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore during 1992-1993.

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