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Awareness of oral cancer among undergraduate students

Madiha Anwar, Beenish Fatima Alam, Talha Nayab, Maryam Asfar, Peraha Sheikh and Ahmer Shakil
Bahria University Medical and Dental College, Pakistan

Background & Aim: Pakistan has a high rate of incidence of oral cancer. In Pakistan, betel nut, betel quid and tobacco are found to be the most important causative agents of oral cancer. Timely detection and diagnosis of oral cancers makes them more responsive to treatments, consequently decreasing mortality rate and increasing the prognosis rate. The study aims to evaluate knowledge and understanding of causes, clinical appearance of oral cancer among undergraduate dental and medical students and to identify the changes and improvements required in the teaching strategies.

Method: A cross-sectional survey was done among 400 medical and dental undergraduate students of Bahria Medical and Dental University. The tool used to evaluate awareness of oral cancer was a self-administered questionnaire modified from Carter to Odgen. The data that was collected was analyzed by SPSS software (v-16) to calculate mean descriptive and percentages of the awareness about causes and early signs of oral cancer among undergraduate students.

Result: Students of dentistry were significantly more habitual of examining the oral mucosa than medical students. Betel nut chewing and tobacco were the commonly identifies risk factors causal agents. Non-healing ulcer was recognized as the common clinical change pertaining to oral cancer. Out of all students only 6% were found to be very well informed.

Conclusion: This study indicates an upgradation of the curriculum. Moreover, awareness programs and campaigns for oral cancer should be held periodically to enhance the awareness of undergraduate students.

madeeha.anwar@gmail.com