

Don't Miss Out on Saving a Life

By Sandy Richardson

The present, n. **1** The moment when you open your eyes. **2** A timeless second. **3** A state of being in the moment. **4** When you move from your head to your heart. **5** The determination of your future. **6** A precious gift.

She awoke early with a flutter in her tummy, anticipating her day as an outpatient in the surgical clinic. At 80 years old, she thought, "Oh well, it can't be so bad, thousands of people have had their gall bladders removed." So she showered, dressed and left for the clinic. Two hours later, she was ready for surgery. The first doctor she met was the anesthesiologist, Dr. Earle. "Nice man," she thought, "I'm feeling better already. Dr. Earle has such nice bedside manner."

Dr. Earle chatted briefly with her, explaining the simplicity of her procedure and then proceeded with the intubation. Suddenly, she could see the concern on his face. Something in the back of her throat stopped the tube! He tried again. No luck. He looked in her throat and saw a large tumor on her tonsil.

Marie's world turned upside down that day. There was no gallbladder surgery. Instead, there was an urgency to properly diagnose and plan how to treat her oral cancer.

This, unfortunately, is how most people discover that they have oral cancer. Approximately 83% of oral cancers are diagnosed by non-dental personnel.

The future, n. **1** A reward for being active in the present. **2** A place of curiosity. **3** Fast paced. **4** Your choice!

The Oral Cancer Foundation reports that oral cancer holds an undeserved high ranking as a killer. More than cervical cancer, melanoma, Hodgkins disease and others you hear much more about. Oral cancer takes the life of someone every hour, every day, of every month, of every year. Each year, 9,000 - 10,000 people die from oral cancer in the United States and 30,000 new cases are diagnosed annually.

Why not get passionate about finding oral cancer and examine every patient as though you'll actually find it? Why do it? Because it saves lives!

Passionate: enthusiastic, eager, fervent, ardent, loving
OR on the other emotional side: emotional, hot-tempered, intense, irate, angered.

Currently, the average five-year survival rate for oral cancer patients is poor. Unfortunately this is due to the lack of identification of the lesion. When the cancer is detected in its early state, the survival rate increases to 88%. Studies have shown that approximately two to six patients per week, in a general practice, will have a lesion. When oral cancer is detected by a hygienist or dentist, the chances of a complete cure are highest. Give your patients the opportunity to celebrate.

Celebration, n. **1** An everyday opportunity. **2** Gratitude with laughter. **3** Dancing to the beat of the heart. **4** A party that delights the soul. **5** Giving thanks for our blessings.

When detected in its later stages, oral cancer is a devastating disease. Late stage treatment usually involves major facial surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy.

Curious to know what happened to Marie? She survived radiation and chemotherapy. Her life for three years following that dreadful day with Dr. Earle, has consisted of drinking a nutrient rich liquid through a stomach tube. She can't swallow and the quality of her life has changed drastically.

Be a hero! By incorporating a program of cancer screening into your practice of dentistry and dental hygiene, you significantly contribute to reducing the death rate and the morbidity of this disease. When oral cancer screenings are part of a complete dental examination, it is truly about saving a life.



The Oral CDX brush biopsy test is a great way to start. It's easy. Why do it? It saves lives and represents a breakthrough in oral cancer detection. It offers a way to improve the prognosis of a disease that has remained unchanged for the last 50 years. Also, adding an extraoral cancer exam will create added value for your patient visit—in the name of prevention.

Get involved. Take advantage of the resources and information provided by the Oral Cancer Foundation and OralScan Laboratories. Make a difference in changing the status-quo. Take a stand against this killer and ask yourself this question: What role will you passionately play in being fully present with each patient so that you can support them with their *future* health needs, providing the opportunity for the two of you to *celebrate* together? It takes so little to save a life!

