

Focus on dental health is important: Dean

Oral hygiene and regular dental check-ups should become a norm for everyone in order to avoid dental health issues.

Mehwish Dean, a dental student at the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) believes oral health is mostly over-looked until there is a need for tooth extraction.

Dean, a final year student said people need to be aware of the risk factors involved in occurrence of oral squamous cell carcinoma.

She raised this concern after recently conducting a study "Prevalence of Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma (OSCC) at Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) Suva Fiji Islands 2011-2015".

Dean used data available to conduct a retrospective study that was carried out at the CWMH Histology Department which focused on OSCC cases diagnosed from 2011-2015.

The research indicated that there were 74 OSCC cases diagnosed during the five-year study period.

The occurrence of OSCC cases over this period was fluctuant with 2013 recording the highest number of cases at 32 percent.

"During the reported period, more men suffered from this condition with the tongue being the most common oral cancer site followed by the lip and vermilion border," said Dean.

Of the 74 cases, there were 53 males diagnosed with OSCC and 21 females.

"This was an interesting finding when compared to previous study which had an equal distribution among both the genders. Both the study complemented each other in terms of site affected with tongue still being the most common at 40%."

"Individuals in age group 45 to 55 years were mostly affected with the i-taukei population recording the highest occurrences (51.35%), followed by Fijians of Indian decent (44.59%) and minority population (4.05%)," Dean commented.

According to Dean, her findings when compared to a study conducted over a ten-year period in 2014 indicated an increase in OSCC cases. She said the earlier national retrospective study had a sample of 124. Since CWM is a major referral hospital of Fiji, this data can be approximated for nationwide which shows an increase in prevalence of OSCC in Fijis population.

"The survival rates were related to age, gender, location, stage, risk factors and treatment, hence more information is required on the specific parts of tongue involved such as ventral, dorsal and lateral borders with specific tumor grades involved and most importantly the trend of risk factors that links all these diagnoses for a better derivation of treatment protocol," she said.



Mehwish Dean, a dental student at the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS)

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), oral cancer ranks sixth among all malignancies worldwide.

Oral squamous cell carcinoma is the sixth most common cancer worldwide. The exact etiology is unknown however it has been associated with tobacco and alcohol consumption, human papilloma virus and other predisposing factors.

Dean added that proper history taking should be done and documented in patient folder including the associated risk factors for OSCC. These documentations can help track the prevalence rate, mortality rate due to OSCC and point out a specific group of risk factors involved for OSCC in the Fijian population. In addition, it can also assist the Ministry of Health of Fiji in data collection and give Fiji a recognition on Globocan; the aim would be to adapt preventative strategies and acquire global support towards decreasing prevalence of OSCC in Fiji.

"The incidence of OSCC is increasing in most countries around the world predominantly in South and Southeast Asia, West and East European, Caribbean and in the Pacific (Papua New Guinea and other Melanesian countries). Fiji is classified as a Melanesian country therefore it is important to that the prevalence of OSCC is reported."

Preventing tobacco and alcohol use and increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables can potentially prevent the vast majority of oral cancers. Early detection through screening and relatively inexpensive treatment can avert most severe cases.

Dean presented her study findings during 58th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Association for Dental Research ANZ Division Undergraduate Colgate poster competition in Perth, Australia where she was announced the second runner-up.