



ORAL HEALTH MONTH



Dentists may be the first to spot health conditions

BY JENNIFER HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Local dentists say that they can be the first line of defence against some diseases that will first show symptoms inside the mouth.

Dr. Sherry Dick, a dentist at Otara Dental, said that dentists can be the first to spot many symptoms inside a patient's mouth that can mean there is trouble in the rest of the body.

"The mouth is the window to the body," Dick said. Dick said that dentists and hygienists may be the first medical professionals to identify the symptoms of Crohn's disease.

Dick said that if patients come to the office with a continuous pattern of ulcers in their mouth they might refer the patient to a physician or an oral pathologist to further investigate. Dick said it is possible that the ulcers are the first sign of Crohn's disease.

"It can be fairly common that that can be the first symptom. Sometimes people will be in the office and they are getting a pattern of ulcerations that we can't explain," Dick said.

Tina Kreiger, a dental hygienist at Bright Dental said that dentists and hygienists may also be the first to notice when a patient is under a lot of stress.

"The increase in stress levels can manifest through sores in the mouth. The increase in stress can cause a decrease in the immune system," Kreiger said.

Along with sores in the mouth, a sudden increase in cavities may be a sign of serious health complications.

The cavities may be brought on by a sudden dry mouth and Dick said that when accompanied by dry eyes, it can mean the patient is suffering from an autoimmune disease called Sjogren's syndrome.

"If we have a patient with sudden extensive decay. If they come in and have a mouthful of cavities it could be because they have a really dry mouth," Dick said.

Sjogren's syndrome is identified most commonly by dry eyes and a dry mouth. The condition causes the inflammation and dysfunction of mucous membranes and moisture-secreting glands in the eyes and mouth. Dick said that if they see patients with a sudden onset in cavities they will refer them to an oral



DAN RIEDLHUBER/St. Albert Gazette

OPEN WIDE – Dr. Sherry Dick, at her practice in Otara Dental in St. Albert, says dentists can detect diseases and illnesses in the mouth before the rest of the body shows symptoms.

pathologist or physician and ask them to test for the autoimmune disorder.

Sleep apnea can be spotted in patients by peeking inside their mouths.

If a patient snores, if I spouse reports that the patient has stopped breathing overnight and if they have daytime tiredness, it may mean that the patient is suffering from sleep apnea. Dentists may refer the patient for sleep tests to determine if they have sleep apnea.

"A lot of patients who snore may have sleep apnea and it can be hard on the organs," Dick said. "When we look in the mouth we may see that the airway is restricted."

Dick said that with any of the conditions that show symptoms in the mouth it is important to catch them early.

"It is so important. Early detection is key. The sooner you identify it the easier it is to repair, the less expensive it is to repair and the fewer complications the patient is going to have."

jhenderson@stalbert.greatwest.ca

Call Otara Dental at: (780) 460-0000

www.otaradental.ca