


Medical Professionals – Referral Ambassador to the Periodontal Clinic

Sunita Kharel,¹ Dr. Nashib Pandey² 

¹Critical Care Unit, B. P. Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital, Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal;

²Department of Periodontics and Oral Implantology, College of Medical Sciences, Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal.

Oral cavity is considered as a gateway to general health. The connection of oral health and systemic health dates back to the era of focal infection (1900-1950) as proposed by William Hunter where wholesale extraction of even salvageable tooth had been carried out in lieu of curing certain systemic disease. With the advancement in evidence-based science, the plausible mechanisms behind the oral - systemic relationships have been explored extensively in the recent years. A simple and common mechanism proposed behind this link as stated by the researchers is that periodontal pathogens and their products, as well as inflammatory mediators produced, enter the bloodstream, causing systemic effects and contributing to systemic diseases. Periodontal diseases have been linked to atherosclerosis, bacterial endocarditis, diabetes mellitus, respiratory disease, adverse pregnancy related outcomes, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, pancreatic cancer, metabolic syndrome, renal disease and neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer's disease. Some investigators have even proved that treating periodontal disease can reduce the severity of certain systemic disease.^{1,2}

Non-dental professionals as well as general public might not be aware of this oral health and systemic disease link. However, medical professionals can act as a referral ambassador in motivating patients for routine dental- periodontal check-ups and treatment

if deemed necessary. Although, medical professionals may not have specialized knowledge and skills related to gingival and periodontal health, they often receive patients with various systemic diseases that have impact on oral health and vice versa. A study conducted among the medical doctors of Nepal found that only 28.6% of the respondents always advised their patients for regular dental checkups.³ (gupta s 2018) With increasing burden of systemic disease in Nepal,⁴ the referral for oral care should be the integral part of the of medical care for better patient care and treatment outcomes.

Here we put forward the various ways in which medical professionals can contribute to motivating patients for routine dental check-ups.

- Emphasizing the importance of oral health: Medical professionals can stress the interrelationship of oral health with general health. They can explain how poor oral health may contribute to systemic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues. This holistic approach can motivate patients to prioritize dental check-ups as part of their overall well-being.
- Educating about preventive care: Medical professionals can educate patients about the significance of preventive dental care. Emphasizing the role of regular check-ups in preventing serious dental issues can encourage patients to see dentists as partners in maintaining good health, rather than only seeking care for acute problems.
- Addressing fear and anxiety: Dental anxiety is a common reason why people avoid dental check-ups. Medical practitioners can address these

Correspondence

Dr. Nashib Pandey

Email: nashibpandey@gmail.com



Citation

Kharel S, Pandey N. Medical Professionals – Referral Ambassador to the Periodontal Clinic. J Nepal Soc Perio Oral Implantol. 2023 Jul-Dec;7(14):95-6.

fears by providing information about modern dental practices, advancements in technology, and the pain management options available during dental procedures. This can help alleviate patients' concerns and encourage them to schedule routine check-ups.

- **Setting an example:** Leading by example is a powerful motivator. Medical practitioners and nurses who prioritize and share their commitment to regular dental check-ups can inspire confidence in their patients. Demonstrating that oral health is a priority for healthcare professionals can influence patients to adopt similar habits.
- **Integration of oral health into overall health assessment:** During routine medical check-ups, practitioners can include questions about patients' oral health habits and encourage discussions about any dental concerns. This integration reinforces the importance of oral health within the broader context of overall health and wellness.
- **Referral and collaboration:** Medical practitioners can facilitate the referral process by establishing strong connections with trusted dental professionals. Providing patients with recommendations and collaborating with dentists can create a seamless transition for individuals to prioritize dental check-ups as part of their healthcare routine.
- **Patient-centered communication:** Tailoring communication to individual patients is essential. Understanding their specific concerns, addressing questions, and providing personalized advice can enhance the likelihood that patients will follow through with dental appointments.
- **Highlighting early detection and intervention:** Stressing the importance of early detection and intervention for dental issues can motivate patients to attend regular check-ups. Early

identification of problems can lead to less invasive and more effective treatments.

In the meantime, periodontists as well as general dental practitioners can help the medical professionals in imparting the recently updated evidence of the mechanisms behind the connections between oral health and systemic diseases through various programs. National gum health day celebrated on 8th Jan every year can be utilized as a platform to organize interactive educational programs addressing medical professionals including nurse practitioners. Oral as well as poster presentations related to the topic of oral health and systemic disease link should be presented in the Medical Society/ Association conferences.

At policy level, the formulation of national guidelines for the treatment of certain systemic diseases and conditions like diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, pregnancy, etc. should include compulsory routine dental examinations and oral prophylaxis to be carried out in every three to six months interval. This can be achieved with the combined efforts of general and specialist societies or associations, related to medical, dental as well as nursing professionals. Medical as well as nursing council can even play a pivotal role in this endeavor.

Medical, dental and nursing professionals can work with hand on hand for the better treatment outcomes and patient care while treating and caring patients with chronic systemic diseases. This can be achieved by utilizing the role of medical and nursing professionals to motivating patients for routine dental check-ups by emphasizing the interrelationship of oral and overall health, educating about preventive care, addressing fears, leading by example, integrating oral health into assessments, facilitating referrals, engaging in patient-centered communication, and highlighting the benefits of early detection and intervention.

REFERENCES

1. Paraskevas S, Huizinga JD, Loos BG. A systematic review and meta-analyses on C-reactive protein in relation to periodontitis. *J Clin Periodontol.* 2008; 35(4): 277-290.
2. Rodrigues DC, Taba MJ, Novaes AB, Souza SL, Grisi MF. Effect of non-surgical periodontal therapy on glycemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus. *J Clin Periodontol.* 2003;74(9):1361-1367.
3. Gupta S, Shrestha B, Gupta N, Tuladhar A, KC S, Dhami B. (2018). Periodontal Health Status and Pregnancy Outcomes: A Survey in Medical Doctors. *J Nep Med Assoc.* 2018;56(210):565-571.
4. Mishra SR, Neupane D, Bhandari PM. et al. Burgeoning burden of non-communicable diseases in Nepal: a scoping review. *Global Health.* 2015;11, 32.