

Study suggests dentists can identify patients at risk for fatal cardiovascular event

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A new study indicates dentists can play a potentially life-saving role in health care by identifying patients at risk of fatal heart attacks and referring them to physicians for further evaluation.

Published in the November issue of the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, the study followed 200 [patients](#) (101 women and 99 men) in private dental practices in Sweden whose dentists used a computerized system, "HeartScore," to calculate the risk of a patient dying from a cardiovascular event within a 10-year period.

Designed by the European Society of Cardiology, HeartScore measures [cardiovascular disease](#) risk in persons aged 40-65 by factoring the person's age, sex, total [cholesterol](#) level, systolic blood pressure and smoking status.

Patients with HeartScores of 10 percent or higher, meaning they had a 10 percent or higher risk of having a fatal heart attack or stroke within a 10-year period, were told by dentists to seek medical advice regarding their condition.

Twelve patients in the study, all of them men, had HeartScores of 10 percent or higher. All women participating in the study had HeartScores of 5 percent or less.

Of the 12 male patients with HeartScores of 10 percent or higher, nine sought further evaluation by a medical care provider who decided that

intervention was indicated for six of the patients. Two patients did not follow the dentist's recommendation to seek further medical evaluation and one patient was only encouraged by his [dentist](#) to discontinue smoking. Physicians for three patients were not able to confirm their risk for cardiovascular disease.

All 200 patients enrolled in the study were 45 years of age or older with no history of cardiovascular disease, medications for high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes and had not visited a physician during the previous year to assess their glucose, cholesterol or [blood pressure](#) levels.

The study's authors conclude that oral health care professionals can identify patients who are unaware of their risk of developing serious complications as a result of cardiovascular disease and who are in need of medical interventions.

According to the authors, "With emerging data suggesting an association between oral and non-oral diseases, and with the possibility of performing chairside screening tests for diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, oral health care professionals may find themselves in an opportune position to enhance the overall health and well-being of their patients."

Source: American Dental Association

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