

Study to Determine True Cost of Oral Cancer

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry and three healthcare partners are working together to determine the true cost-burden of oral cancer.

"We want to determine whether preventing the disease reduces the costs, but first we need to know those costs," said Dr. Joel Epstein, professor of oral medicine and diagnostic sciences at UIC. "We want to find out what the cost of care is, from diagnosis to survivorship."

UIC's industry and professional partners include Delta Dental of Michigan, Delta Dental of Wisconsin, and Thomson Reuters.

The costs of [oral cancer](#), Epstein said, include the direct cost of care, including medical, pharmacy and dental costs, and ongoing costs due to complications of therapy and potential disability.

Indirect costs include absenteeism and decreased worker productivity that come along with disabling side effects of treatment, said Dr. Jed Jacobson, chief science officer and senior vice president of Delta Dental of Michigan.

Most oral cancers require costly and disfiguring medical intervention. Oral cancer is dangerous because in its early stages it may not be noticed by the patient, Epstein said. It frequently grows without producing pain or readily recognizable symptoms, and it has a high risk of producing second, primary tumors. The survival rate is 80 percent to 90 percent if caught in its early stages, Epstein said. The number decreases to 25

percent to 35 percent if detected in the late stages.

The social, psychological and economic effects of oral health are a relatively underdeveloped area of research, Epstein said. "That's why the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has called for increased collaboration among health care providers, health care financiers, educators, researchers and policymakers."

Researchers will examine comparative value of preventive care for oral cancers versus treatment. "We need to get a handle on the impact of these diseases and how we can combat them better," said Jacobson. The study is expected to be completed in six months.

Thomson Reuters, an information company for businesses and professionals, will use its market research databases to evaluate the cost of oral cancers among patients with employer-sponsored insurance, Medicare with employer-sponsored supplemental insurance, or Medicaid. The study will also use information from Delta Dental of Michigan's Research and Data Institute.

"We have access to a timely, rich source of healthcare claims and enrollment information for millions of Americans," said Teresa Gibson, project director for Thomson Reuters. "Our health outcomes team has extensive experience conducting retrospective studies."

"This research is long-overdue and is an outstanding example of different disciplines coming together for a common good that could benefit millions of people," said Dr. Fred Eichmiller, science officer at Delta Dental of Wisconsin.

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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