

# National recognition for potential 'over the counter' gum disease test

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A research study at Plymouth University Peninsula School of Dentistry (UK) which aims to develop a simple saliva test for gum diseases, has been recognised by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), which has included the study in its portfolio.

Periodontitis is common inflammatory oral disease that affects the supporting structures of the teeth (gums and bone). It is also linked to other diseases such as diabetes and arteriosclerosis (thickening of the artery walls), making it a significant problem in dental patient care.

According to the British Society of Periodontology, around 10 per cent of the UK population appear to suffer from the more severe forms of the disease which result in tooth loss. Across the world, around 70 per cent of people have some form of the disease.

During the disease process the bone and soft tissue that hold teeth in place are destroyed - teeth become loose and eventually fall out.

As well as being unpleasant for the patient, periodontitis is time-consuming and expensive to treat. As a result, it is crucial that a way is found to prevent the disease, assess its risks and ensure early detection.

At present diagnosis relies on a visual assessment and radiography. These methods can only detect what damage the disease has caused - they cannot be used to assess the current status of the disease or predict the risk of future disease.

As a consequence, the Plymouth research team are developing a rapid and reliable saliva test which in time may be made available to large numbers of people as an 'over the counter' product, for routine use by the general public.

It is this potential to benefit the health of a large number of the population, its relevance to the NHS and funding through an NIHR partner which has led to the study being adopted by the NIHR. This means the study has access to support from the Clinical Research Network: South West Peninsula (CRN: SWP) to help recruit people to take part in the study. Studies that access CRN support are more likely to stay on track, as recruitment targets and clear timescales are agreed by the CRN and they can support recruitment activity through access to staff resource or service support costs.

The study is led by Dr. Svetislav Zaric, Senior Lecturer in Biomedical Science at Plymouth University Peninsula School of Dentistry. He said: "At present the diagnostic tools available for periodontitis are very limited and cannot predict future damage caused by the [disease](#). Not only will our [saliva test](#) achieve this but, because it is fast, reliable, safe and relatively cheap, it could be used without prescription by members of the public 'over the counter'. We are really grateful to the NIHR for its support, which will allow us to take our studies to the next level - including investigating ways and procedures to get this test to the people who need it."

Helen Quinn, Chief Operating Officer for the Clinical Research Network: South West Peninsula, said: "We'd like to congratulate Dr Zaric on an excellent research study and its adoption onto the NIHR portfolio. It's fantastic when researchers here in the South West generate such worthwhile clinical trials, which could ultimately benefit a huge number of people worldwide. This is a great example of how the Network can support our local researchers by helping them to deliver

their innovative clinical trials within the NHS."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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