

Alerting patients to their risk of gum disease improves inflammation and dental hygiene

April 18 2019

In a new study published today in the *Journal of Periodontology* researchers found that using psychological techniques to communicate the risk of developing periodontal disease to patients improved dental hygiene over a three month period. It was further associated with reduced scores for gum inflammation as well.

Periodontal diseases are infections that cause inflammation of the structures around the teeth, including the gums, [periodontal ligament](#) and alveolar bone. In the earliest stage of [periodontal disease](#)—gingivitis—the inflammation is limited to the surface of the gums. In more severe forms of the disease—periodontitis—bone is destroyed around the teeth.

The team of scientists from King's College London's Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences tested a group of 97 adults with moderate periodontal disease who were registered patients at a London General Dental Practice.

They either received treatment as usual, an individualised report on their periodontal disease risk (PreViser™), or an individualised report plus a programme of goal-setting, planning and self-monitoring based on psychological theory.

The study found that over 12 weeks:

- Dental plaque reduced significantly in the two groups with whom

risk was communicated, but not in the "treatment as usual" group.

- The percentage of areas that bled on examination (gum inflammation) reduced in all groups, but the effect was more pronounced in the groups that received the [psychological intervention](#).
- Frequency of interdental cleaning improved only in the intervention groups

Lead author Dr. Koula Asimakopoulou, Reader in Health Psychology at King's College London said: "Our study shows that by adopting a simple psychological intervention, aided by the use of an online risk assessment tool, we can significantly improve measurable clinical outcomes and reduce initial signs of gum disease in patients seen routinely in General Dental Practice."

Dr. Matthew Nolan, the dental practitioner who delivered the intervention noted: "Shaping how [health information](#) is presented to our patients appears to influence their subsequent behaviour. Patients are naturally concerned about their risk of periodontal disease; we have found that coupling their concern with a structured discussion of coping strategies and simple behaviour change techniques, may be a useful driving force in improving [health outcomes](#) within a routine dental consultation."

Dr. Mark Ide, President of the British Society for Periodontology said: "This paper is interesting as it builds on research previously carried out at King's to show how useful a patient-focussed health care intervention can be in the real-life primary care setting."

"At a time when the best way to improve the periodontal health of the majority of people is being considered, this paper demonstrates how interdisciplinary teams of psychologists and dentists working together

can deliver improvements in patients' oral health and periodontal status. Good daily oral care is a core element of achieving and maintaining good oral health, and this may have an impact on other aspects of health as well."

Provided by King's College London

Citation: Alerting patients to their risk of gum disease improves inflammation and dental hygiene (2019, April 18) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-patients-gum-disease-inflammation-dental.html>

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