

GUM DISEASE MAY INCREASE RISK OF HEART DISEASE

A study of American Indians in the Gila River Indian community of Mesa, Ariz., found that periodontal disease was a stronger risk factor for heart disease than any of the other conditions usually linked to it, including hypertension, high cholesterol, age and gender.

One of the researchers, Dr. Robert J. Genco, State University of New York Distinguished Professor and chair of the University at Buffalo Department of Oral Biology, reported the results at the March 23 meeting of the International Association for Dental Research in Orlando.

"We have always suspected that periodontal disease was a true risk factor for cardiovascular disease, but our studies have been confounded by the presence of smoking," he said.

"Smoking is rare in this community of Pima Indians, so it was not a factor (in development of periodontal disease and heart disease). We found a powerful association between the existence of periodontal disease at the study baseline and the development of cardiovascular disease in the succeeding 10 years."

Diabetes was the only factor that showed a stronger association with the development of cardiovascular disease. Forty percent of the Gila River residents have diabetes.

Dental research is beginning to show stronger associations between oral health and many systemic diseases. In the case of periodontal disease contributing to an increased risk of heart

disease, Dr. Genco speculated that the bacteria associated with periodontal disease may be the culprit.

"Oral bacteria enters the bloodstream via small ulcers in the gum tissue," he said. "These bacteria cause platelets to aggregate and form clumps or thrombi. These clumps accumulate on damaged tissue, such as lesions in the blood vessel or a heart-valve replacement, which represents a damaged area in the heart. The transplanted bacteria can cause the valve to become infected, and the accumulated clumps can block blood vessels."

"We've known for some time that oral bacteria can infect damaged hearts and that certain oral bacteria cause platelets to aggregate," Dr. Genco continued. "We just recently put these findings together as a possible explanation of how bacteria that cause periodontal disease can also increase the risk for heart disease."

Researchers participating in the study were from University of Michigan School of Dentistry and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases in Phoenix. The study was supported by a U.S. Public Health Service grant.

1997 CANCER PREDICTIONS

In 1997, the American Cancer Society in Atlanta predicts an estimated 1,382,400 new cancer cases will be diagnosed in the United States. Of these, 30,750 will be of the mouth and pharynx.

"In spite of the good news—age-adjusted death rates for all cancers are dropping in the United States—oral cavity and pharyngeal cancers still occur far

too often. These cancers combined will result in more than 8,000 deaths in 1997," said American Cancer Society President Myles P. Cunningham, M.D., of the latest statistics.

This year, ACS estimates that 560,000 cancer-related deaths will occur in the United States (1,500 people a day), 8,400 of which will be from cancer of the mouth and pharynx.

Said Dr. Cunningham, "Oral and pharyngeal cancers are highly preventable. Tobacco and alcohol use account for the majority. Every health care professional interacting with an individual should inquire about lifestyle changes, particularly smoking, and counsel patients on healthful lifestyles. This is particularly true today in light of the dramatic upswing in cigar use. Dentists can be particularly helpful in this area."

The January-February 1997 issue of *Cancer* reports that the three most common sites of cancer in women are the breast, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum. For men, they are the prostate, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum.

STEROID INHALERS AND GLAUCOMA

People with asthma heralded the introduction of steroid inhalers for combating lung and bronchial passage inflammation. However, dentists and other health care providers who treat patients who use such inhalers should be aware of a study published in the March 5 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study suggests that prolonged administration of high doses of these inhaled synthetic