

South African Dental Association Educational Theme 2017 “Oral manifestations of infectious disease”

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“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Benjamin Franklin so eloquently expressed these words in 1736 in a bid to mobilise preventative efforts against the devastating effects of fire outbreaks. They remain true and apply equally to oral disease. In spite of the rapid advances in molecular diagnostics, infectious disease remains one of the greatest threats to humanity. The choice of infectious disease as the topic of focus for this educational theme is primarily aimed at raising awareness of the most common oral infections, to encourage early recognition, diagnosis and appropriate management. Possibly more significantly, we hope to empower oral health care workers through knowledge in order to facilitate patient education and information for disease prevention.

HIV/AIDS best exemplifies the financial and social effects of the burden of infectious disease. South Africa remains the country worldwide with the highest rate of HIV-infection. Concomitantly, and possibly in association with the HIV onslaught, there has been a resurgence of a multitude of previously “eradicated” infectious pathogens. Infections continue to claim millions of lives annually in developing countries. Complicating this is an increased strain of dual pathological disease as the incidences of cancer and chronic disease steadily rise. In addition, the contemporary overuse of antibiotics has, ironically, rendered patients more vulnerable to infections following the resultant emergence of “super bugs”. The ensuing health risks to humans are highlighted by the formal classification of the so-called “priority pathogens” by the World Health Organisation, whilst the United Nations predicts that by 2050 there will be at least 10 million deaths annually, directly related to antibiotic resistance.

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Oral manifestations are frequently the first clinical indication of systemic disease or underlying immune dysfunction. It is thus imperative that oral health care workers be equipped with the skills to identify these clinical features to expedite therapeutic intervention and for the prevention of the spread of disease. Infection-related mortality in lower socio-economic regions, particularly in association with HIV/AIDS, represents a significant public health concern worthy of renewed awareness campaigns. The commitment to continued education on the part of the South African Dental Association for the prevention and clinical recognition of traditional and emerging infectious disease is commendable. The opportunity to actively participate in the Journal in such an initiative is a privilege and the role of the Association is sincerely acknowledged. These sentiments are extended to Professor Willie van Heerden, Head of Department, Department of Oral Pathology and Oral Biology at the University of Pretoria, for his support and guidance in this undertaking.

A dedicated section in keeping with the focus on infectious disease will be included in this and subsequent editions of the South African Dental Journal over the duration of the current Educational Theme. These articles will include reviews of the most common viral, fungal and bacterial pathogens as well as a consideration of emerging trends in infectious disease related to implant dentistry and will provide updates on the role of oncogenic micro-organisms.

The continued pursuit of knowledge in the field of oral infectious pathology is fundamental for holistic patient care. Furthermore, patient counselling and reassurance are essential components of any therapeutic approach. We hope this theme inspires a dynamic motivation to minimise the impact of infections on overall oral health.

“Infectious Disease is one of the few genuine adventures left in the world.” - Hans Zinsser