

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

FREE ORAL CANCER SCREENING SET FOR FRIDAY

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JACKSON, Miss. – Mississippi has one of the highest smoking rates in the nation, with 26 percent of its residents lighting up regularly. But even non-smokers should be aware of the warning signs for oral cancer. For that reason, physicians and dentists at the University of Mississippi Medical Center's Oral Oncology Clinic urge everyone to take advantage of the free oral screening to be held April 27 as part of Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week.

The oral-screening event will be held at the clinic's location in the Thad C. Cochran Jackson Medical Mall Thad C. Cochran Center from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. People interested in signing up for a screening are asked to call 601-815-1181.

"We had 56 people make appointments last year, and all of them were screened. Six of those were referred on to head and neck oncology for follow-up," said Dr. Karen Crews, professor of oral oncology and behavioral medicine in the Department of Otolaryngology and Communicative Science.

Oral cancer affects the head or neck, specifically the nasal cavity, sinuses, lips, mouth, thyroid glands, salivary glands, throat or larynx. More than 52,000 new cases of oral cancer are expected this year, with 11,500 deaths from those cancers, according to the American Cancer Society.

Most oral cancers occur on the lips, tongue or the floor of the mouth, and if they are not caught early, they can be disastrous.

"The survival rates for head and neck cancers are bad in general. The five-year survival rate is about 50 percent," said Dr. Kristen Otto, assistant professor of otolaryngology.

But younger patients who don't smoke respond better to treatment and have higher survival rates, she added.

Tobacco and alcohol use are the leading risk factors for oral, head and neck cancers. According to the National Cancer Institute, 85 percent of head and neck cancers are linked to tobacco use. What's more, people who use both tobacco and alcohol are at greater risk for developing these cancers than those who use only tobacco or alcohol.

"Smoking combined with alcohol is kind of synergistic," said Otto. "Alcohol on it's own is going to put you at slightly increased risk. But when you smoke and drink, you're at synergistically high levels of increased risk."

Warning signs include having a sore in your mouth that doesn't heal, persistent pain or the sensation of something being stuck in your throat.

Crews said dentists and dental hygienists should perform an oral cancer screening on every patient they see.

"We perform this procedure on every patient who comes into our practice, and we've been doing it for our entire careers," she said. "What the UMMC team offers the community is a coordinated effort. For example, if our clinicians detect an oral problem, we can then refer the patient to the clinician who can initiate treatment. We are part of a comprehensive team made up of dentists, head and neck surgeons and radiation and medical oncologists who are ready to provide care."

In addition to Crews, Otto and Jefferson, Dr. George Taybos, Dr. Harold Kolodney, Dr. Shelly Taylor and the entire oral oncology dental team will also participate in the screening. Employees with the ACT Center for Tobacco Treatment, Education and Research will be on hand to provide information about quitting smoking and other tobacco products.

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Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: LAGriffin@umc.edu.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at <http://publicaffairs.umc.edu/>