

Abstract

The use of tobacco is the leading cause of disease that can be prevented. The biggest role a dental hygienist plays with the use of tobacco is educating patients how it effects the oral cavity and entire body. In 2015, there were 36.5 million people that smoked cigarettes in the United States (CDC). Tobacco use in any form can affect the human body, the oral cavity, the treatment, and cessation. It contains nicotine, which is very addictive, and thousands of chemicals that cause harm on the body. Many do not realize the effects that the chemicals within tobacco have on the oral cavity. Tobacco has many effects on the oral cavity including staining, tooth discoloration, dry mouth, increased risk of periodontal disease, caries, and the most severe being oral cancer. Periodontal disease is the irreversible disease state of bone loss within the oral cavity. Once the disease has started, it can be maintained but the patient will never get back the bone they have lost. Oral cancer is caused by the damage tobacco has on the oral mucosa leading to lesions and/or tumors that can become malignant. As future dental hygienist's, it is important to educate patients about the effects of tobacco and how it can even occur by second hand smoke. Performing tobacco cessation is key in reducing the risk of cancers from using tobacco. It is important to recommend the patient quit but also teaching patients how to perform self oral cancer exams. Some patients will never stop smoking no matter the risk they are at. By teaching them how to do an oral cancer self exam, the incidence of oral cancer can hopefully be reduced or at least caught early. Overall, the dental hygienist is an educator as well as a provider.