

## *Oral Cancer in South Carolina: A Fact Sheet*

### **What Is The Public Health Issue?**

An estimated 28,000 new cases of oral cancer and 7,200 deaths from these cancers occurred in the United States in 2004<sup>a</sup>. The age-adjusted incidence was more than twice as high among men than among women, as was the mortality rate<sup>b</sup>. More than 40% of persons diagnosed with oral cancer die within five years of diagnosis<sup>c</sup>.

### **Quickfacts: Oral Cancer in the U.S.:**

- ✓ Persons aged 45 and older account for 90% of oral cancer cases
- ✓ More than 90% of oral cancers can be attributed to tobacco or alcohol use
- ✓ Men are twice as likely as women to contract and die from oral

More than 90% of oral cancers can be attributed to tobacco use, alcohol use, and both tobacco and alcohol use<sup>a</sup>. Sun exposure can also be a risk factor for oral cancer. Low consumption of fruit and some types of human papilloma virus infections have also been implicated<sup>b</sup>.

### **How Is Oral Cancer Diagnosed?**

An examination for oral cancer may be done during a physical examination by your dentist or physician. An oral cancer exam is painless and quick. Your health care provider will inspect your face, neck, lips and mouth to look for any signs of cancer. With both hands, he or she will feel the area under your jaw and the side of your neck, checking for lumps that may suggest cancer. Next, your provider will have you stick out your tongue so that it can be checked for swelling or abnormal color or texture. In addition, he or she will look at the roof and floor of your mouth, as well as the back of your throat. He or she will then look at and feel the insides of your lips and cheeks to check for possible signs of cancer, such as red and/or white patches.

Using gauze, he or she will then gently pull your tongue to one side, then the other, to check the base of your tongue. The underside of your tongue will also be checked. Finally, your provider will put one finger on the floor of your mouth and, with the other hand under your chin, gently press down to check for lumps or sensitivity.

### **How Is South Carolina Doing?**

Oral cancer is the 9<sup>th</sup> most common cancer in South Carolina, with 2,897 oral cancers diagnosed between 1996 and 2001<sup>b</sup> (or about 480 new cases per year). South Carolina ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for deaths from oral cancer<sup>d</sup>. The majority (70%) of oral cancers occurred in males, with black males having the highest incidence. There are three counties in South Carolina (Charleston, Georgetown, and Richland) with oral cancer rates higher than the state average<sup>b</sup>.

### **Related U.S. Healthy People Year 2010 Objectives:**

- ✓ Objective 21-6: Increase the proportion of oral and pharyngeal cancers detected at the earliest stage from 35% to 50%.
  - In South Carolina, 37% of oral cancers are detected at the early stage (localized)
  - Only 2% are detected before they become invasive.
- ✓ Objective 21-7: Increase the proportion of adults over 40 years old who, in the past 12 months, report having had an examination to detect oral and pharyngeal cancer.
  - In the U.S., about 13% of adults aged 40 and over had an exam for oral cancer in the last 12 months.
  - In South Carolina, 14.6% of adults aged 18 and over had an exam for oral cancer.

## What Is South Carolina Doing?

### In Schools:

- ✓ The Oral Health Supplementary Curriculum Resource for 7<sup>th</sup> grade contains several classroom activities to teach students about the risk of oral cancer caused by tobacco use.
- ✓ “Tragic Choice: The Bob Leslie Story” is an anti-spit tobacco campaign with the following objectives:
  - identify the dangers of using smokeless tobacco
  - identify populations that are at high risk for using smokeless tobacco
  - motivate adolescents to avoid the use of smokeless tobacco products

### In the Community:

- ✓ The South Carolina chapter of the Yul Brynner Foundation hosts Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week each year in April. Events include free screenings, community education, a Survivor’s Banquet, and a research day.
- ✓ MUSC holds free mouth cancer screenings throughout the year at different community locations.

### Tobacco and alcohol use in SC:

- 52.7% of South Carolina residents use tobacco at least occasionally.
- 47.5% of South Carolina residents drank on at least one occasion in the past month.
- More than 30% of high school students and more than 15% of middle school students have used a tobacco product in the last 30 days.
- More than 40% of high school students drank alcohol in the last 30 days.

For further information on oral cancer:

<http://www.cancer.org/downloads/PRO/OralCancer.pdf> (American Cancer Society)

<http://www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/oral/page10> (National Institutes of Health)

<http://www.dhec.sc.gov/health/chcdp/cancer/index.htm>

<http://www.scdhec.net/co/phsis/biostatistics/SCCCR/SCCCRmain.htm> (South Carolina Central Cancer Registry)

For further information on tobacco and alcohol use in South Carolina:

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/> (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System)

[http://www.scdhec.gov/hs/epidata/brfss\\_index.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/hs/epidata/brfss_index.htm) (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)

Or contact SC-DHEC, Division of Oral Health or Division of Cancer Prevention and Control

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

Division of Oral Health

1751 Calhoun St

Columbia, SC 29205

#### References:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010*. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System*. 2005 results for South Carolina, available at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbs/SelHealthTopic.asp?Loc=SC>

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*. 2005 results for tobacco use. Available at

[http://www.scdhec.gov/hs/epidata/brfss\\_index.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/hs/epidata/brfss_index.htm)