

24 November 2021

The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan launch their Mouth Cancer Action Charter to Parliament

- *The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan have today presented a Mouth Cancer Action Charter to Members of Parliament to gain support and signatures from politicians and ministers as part of November's Mouth Cancer Action Month.*
- *The Mouth Cancer Charter lists a series of policy recommendations to tackle the rising rates of mouth cancer and highlights the harm that can be done when patients are not diagnosed at an early stage.*
- *Just under half (45%) of all mouth cancers are diagnosed in stage IV, when the cancer is at its most advanced. As a result of late diagnosis, the UK has seen a 48% rise in the number of people losing their life to mouth cancer over the last decade.*

The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan have today launched their Mouth Cancer Action Charter at a face-to-face event in the Houses of Parliament. Members of Parliament, ministers and dental and health professionals have been invited along to sign the Charter and demonstrate their support for its policy recommendations.

The Mouth Cancer Charter has been created to coincide with November's Mouth Cancer Action Month – the UK's biggest charity campaign for mouth cancer awareness. The campaign calls for more people to be mouthaware by being able to recognise and act on any unusual changes to the mouth.

The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan are concerned that mouth cancer referrals have significantly fallen over the pandemic period, while awareness of the major signs and symptoms of mouth cancer is very low. According to results from a recent MP survey, only 27% of MPs felt they were as well informed of the causes and symptoms of mouth cancer as they are of other leading cancers.¹

¹ YouGov completed online interviews with a representative sample of 103 MPs
The survey was completed between 6th and 28th September 2021;

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director at Denplan, part of Simplyhealth said: “We’ve worked together with the Oral Health Foundation for over 20 years on the Mouth Cancer Action Campaign, but we wanted to go one step further this year by spreading the mouth cancer awareness messages further and wider into the corridors of Westminster.”

“Mouth cancer referrals will have been significantly reduced due to the Covid pandemic restrictions last year and delays have been incurred by the dental backlog and access to NHS dentistry remaining difficult in certain areas. We urge the Government to consider these mouth cancer policy interventions. The longer the delay to implement these changes, the more lives could be lost to mouth cancer as possible cases go undetected. Top of the policy recommendation list is that we are calling on the Government to fund a public health awareness campaign on the signs and symptoms of mouth cancer.”

Recent research conducted by The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan shows that four-in-five UK adults have never been exposed to public health messaging around mouth cancer, leading to poor awareness of the early warning signs and risk factors².

Dr Rutland said: “If people can easily recognise the risk factors and what to look out for in terms of changes in their mouth, health professionals will also be able to catch cases earlier. Late diagnosis of mouth cancer is becoming all too common and this will have a severe effect on a person’s quality of life and their chances of survival.”

The Charter proposes that GP’s, pharmacists, care home and nursing staff should all be given enhanced training or further information about how to look out for signs and symptoms of mouth cancer to further improve early detection. Spotting signs early can increase someone’s chances of survival from 50% to 90%.

Commenting on the policy recommendations proposed in the Charter, Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation said:

“If these mouth cancer policy changes were put into action we could drive down case numbers and save the government a significant amount of money in oral cancer treatment costs. In England, the cost of head and neck cancer treatment was £309m in 2010-11³ and since then case numbers of mouth cancer have grown by around 67%.”

² The research was carried out online by Research Without Barriers – RWB. All surveys were conducted between 6th October 2021 and 8th October 2021. The sample comprised 2,008 UK adults

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28734109/>

[The Mouth Cancer Action Charter](#) highlights the following policy areas for change:

1. Conduct a government funded public health awareness campaign of the signs and symptoms of mouth cancer.
2. Improve access to routine dentistry to detect mouth cancers earlier and save lives.
3. Enable enhanced training of GPs to identify suspected mouth cancers and change the NICE guidelines so that more cases can be referred to secondary care.
4. Improve training programmes for healthcare staff to look for signs of mouth cancer.
5. Introduce free dental check-ups and treatment for mouth cancer patients to end the unfair financial burden placed on them.
6. Support the development of better technology to diagnose mouth cancers.

One of the key points in the mouth cancer charter is about the development of better technology to diagnose mouth cancers. During the pandemic, it has become more evident that innovation, data and technology are helping to make dentistry safer, faster and more accessible.

The use of technology in diagnostics is also becoming more important. Denplan and the Oral Health Foundation are proposing that with the support from NHSX a mobile app could be developed that would enable patients to share photographs of their mouth lesions which would then be reviewed within a short space of time by a consultant.

In addition to politicians and ministers, the Oral Health Foundation and Denplan are also asking dental professionals and other healthcare professionals to show their support and sign the Charter at www.dentalhealth.org/mouth-cancer-action-charter. More information on mouth cancer can be found on the website and by following the campaign on social media via #MouthCancerAction.

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Notes to Editors

About Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth

Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth, is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist with more than 6,600 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.4 million patients registered to Denplan products. Denplan, also provides a wide range of professional services for its member dentists and their practice teams, including the Denplan Quality Programme and Denplan Excel Certification Programme. Plus regulatory advice, business and marketing consultancy services and networking opportunities.

Dentist enquiries telephone: 0800 169 9962. For patient enquiries telephone: 0800 401 402. For details of all of our products, visit www.denplan.co.uk

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About Simplyhealth

Since 1872, we've been helping people make the most of life through better everyday health. Our plans make sure individuals, families and employees can easily access in-person and virtual wellbeing services, and afford to stay healthy by claiming costs back on dental treatments, visits to the optician, complementary therapies and much more.

Today we're delighted to be the UK's leading health solutions company, with almost 1000 colleagues serving 2.3 million customers. We don't have shareholders, so we're led by our purpose of improving access to healthcare, for the many, for the long term. We're passionate about using our voice in public health affairs and partnering with charities to reduce health inequality – each year we commit to giving 10% of pre-tax profits to a range of community causes. And we ensure our business takes care of the planet too, achieving Carbon Neutral + status in 2021.

About the Oral Health Foundation

The Oral Health Foundation is the leading national charity working to improve oral health. Our goal is to improve people's lives by reducing the harm caused by oral diseases – many of which are entirely preventable. Established nearly 50 years ago, we continue to provide expert, independent and impartial advice on all aspects of oral health to those who need it most. We work closely with Government, dental and health professionals, manufacturers, the dental trade, national and local agencies and the public, to achieve our mission of addressing the inequalities which exist in oral health, changing people's lives for the better. Visit www.dentalhealth.org for more information.