

Title:

Survey of Oral Cancer Screening Participants Reveals Widespread Misconceptions about Oral Cancer Risk Factors, Independent of Educational Background

Authors:

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Main Text:

Introduction: To develop more effective strategies to screen for oral cancer, we surveyed participants in a free oral cancer-screening event held at Stanford University to assess knowledge and understanding of oral cancer risk factors and behaviors.

Method: The survey was administered by trained members of the oral cancer screening team in accordance with guidelines approved by the Stanford Research Compliance Office.

Results: Participants (n=51) were racially diverse with varied educational levels: approximately 43% of participants had completed high school only or attended some college, and 57% of participants had obtained a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. A majority of the participants (62%) reported an annual income below \$50,000, and a minority of participants (35%) had active dental insurance. Most of the participants (84%) had never previously been screened for oral cancer. All participants, regardless of educational level, demonstrated limited knowledge of the risk factors that contribute to oral cancer. Approximately 50% of the lower-education cohort and 31% of the higher-education cohort incorrectly believed that dental fillings increase the risk of developing oral cancer. Only 23% and 34% of the lower- and higher-education cohorts, respectively, correctly identified heavy alcohol consumption as a risk factor for oral cancer. Encouragingly, 85% of all participants recognized that behavioral changes can decrease one's risk of developing cancer.

Conclusions: Knowledge of oral cancer risk factors was low in all participants despite the majority of responders having obtained post-secondary degrees. Our work highlights the need to expand the target audience of oral cancer educational efforts to include community members from all educational backgrounds.