Free Screenings for Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week

Help otolaryngologists remain the leaders in the treatment of this disease

As a specialty, one of our tasks is to educate patients about how otolaryngologists are expertly trained to treat head and neck cancers. It is up to us to explain to the public the symptoms of head and neck cancers and the lifestyle choices that can lead to them; our duties as physicians do not end when clinic hours are over.

One of the best ways to show the public such expertise is by participating in Oral Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week (OHANCAW), held this year from April 27–May 3. In doing so, you may even gain a few patients.

There are numerous ways to be involved with this growing public awareness campaign. You can distribute literature to patients, send press releases to local media promoting the week, or educate fellow physicians in your practice or hospital. The single biggest way to raise awareness about head and neck cancer and our specialty is by hosting a free cancer screening. The Head and Neck Cancer Alliance is the sponsor of OHANCAW. You can visit www.ohancaw.com to learn more about this public awareness event.

The benefits of free screenings

In 2008, there were more than 150 free cancer-screening sites held in conjunction with OHANCAW. Each screening site fulfilled two purposes—to provide a quick examination of the oral cavity, glands, and lymph nodes; and to educate patients about the causes and symptoms of head and neck cancers. The actual screening process takes just a few minutes per patient, and rarely produces more than one or two cancer diagnoses at each site. "Statistically, screening has really not been shown to diagnose a significant number of cancers. However, every year we have diagnosed at least one tumor in the head and neck, thyroid, or on the skin," says **Cherie Ann Nathan, MD**, of Shreveport, LA. The biggest benefits come through educating patients.

A cancer diagnosis at one of the free screenings generally means early detection and a higher success rate for

curing that patient. "Oral and other head and neck cancers remain a target for early detection. When diagnosed very early, it is much easier to treat and cure," says Academy member **Terry A. Day, MD**, of Charleston, SC, founder of OHANCAW. "Unfortunately, we are not finding these cancers early enough to cure more of them."

Wendell G. Yarbrough, MD, of Nashville, TN, has been hosting free screenings since the late 1990s. "One argument that arises as people are deciding whether or not to participate in OHANCAW is that very few cancers will be discovered through the screening," he says. "This is true, but I would like Academy members to understand that the purpose of OHANCAW is not only to screen, but also to raise visibility of head and neck cancer. Education of physicians, dentists, oral surgeons, and the general public may lead to earlier diagnosis and/or avoidance of risk factors and improve survival of patients with head and neck cancer."

How to start a local event

The following general recommendations can get you started in planning a screening for your local area.

+ Set up an Executive Committee. It can often include dentists, physicians, nurses, dental hygienists, speech pathologists, nutritionists, physical therapists, and survivors.
+ Find a location—clinic, church, mall, hospital, dentist or physician office, or hallway.
+ Establish contact information—a phone number and/or website for information and scheduling.
+ Determine what equipment is needed: A room or private area surrounded by curtains, light source, tongue blades, gauze, trash can, sign-in sheets, screening forms, table, and informational handouts on tobacco cessation and on oral, head/neck cancers.
+ Obtain administrative approval. IRB or legal review of any/all documentation, medical care, research, and identifying information may be necessary, depending upon the institution and location.

Organizing your free screening

While hosting a free screening may appear to be a daunting task, it is not as hard as it seems, partly because of the resources and tools available through the Head and Neck Cancer Alliance (www.headandneck.org) and the official OHANCAW website (www.ohancaw.com). These websites have numerous documents to guide you through the process of setting up your screening site. General requirements for a screening advise you about whom to recruit, how to choose a location, and the needed equipment and approvals. Also detailed are tools to help promote your screening, including press releases to help promote your screening in local media and posters to hang in the community to make people aware of the screening.

Each screening registered through the official OHANCAW website will be provided a full webpage for the public to find your screening site and learn more about your practice. Media materials will be available for your office, hospital, or organization to distribute to local television, newspapers, and radio outlets

to help promote your event.

The Academy also has many tools to help on the day of your screening. With the largest library of peer-reviewed patient information leaflets, the Academy can help you strengthen the educational elements. (For a full listing of health information for patients, go to www.entnet.org.)

Benefits of participating

Participating in a public awareness campaign has numerous benefits to the community. An educated public has a better opportunity for early detection and assurance that trained experts are treating patients. These benefits last beyond the screening week. "I feel that hosting a screening is a public service and gets patients thinking. It also makes patients aware of our specialty and what we can do for them," says **Wendy B. Stern, MD**, of North Dartmouth, MA. "Many patients may not have heard of otolaryngologists, and this is a great way for them to learn."

Sign up now as the first site in your community to offer a free head and neck cancer screening, by logging on to ohancaw.com. B

CORE Grant societies support research for treatment of oral, head, and neck cancers

Since 1985, the AAO-HNSF, the American Head and Neck Society (AHNS), and the American Laryngological, Rhinological and Otological Society, Inc., aka The Triological Society, have awarded over $2 million to further research in oral, head and neck cancers. These three societies, in conjunction with nine additional societies,* form the Centralized Otolaryngology Research Efforts (CORE) grant program. The grant program is administered by the AAO-HNSF, but funded jointly by all 12 societies. CORE aims to unify the research application and review process, encourage young investigators to pursue research in otolaryngology, and serve as an interim step that may eventually channels efforts for important NIH funding opportunities.

In 2008, 13 grants were awarded by the AAO-HNSF, AHNS, and the Triological Society, providing $314,047 in funding for research in oral, head and neck cancers. This represented 43 percent of the total CORE grants awarded that year.

As of January 15, 2009, the CORE grant program has received 149 applications. Of those, 54 (33%), are seeking $950,000 to support research in oral, head and neck cancers. With the limited funds available, we hope to be able to fund at least a third of those research studies. Notification will be sent to applicants by early June 2009.

Eben L. Rosenthal, MD, now Associate Professor of Surgery at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, received the AAO-HNSF Resident Research Award in 1996 and the AHNS/AAO-HNSF Young Investigator Research Development Award in 2003. "The process of writing for grants and receiving critiques is probably the most important element that new investigators need to learn in order to effectively communicate their research findings and objectives," says Dr. Rosenthal. Since his first CORE grant, Dr. Rosenthal has been awarded two NIH grants to study aspects of head and neck cancer and oral cancer.

The CORE grant program relies heavily on dollars provided by the 12 societies and gifts from individuals. Please consider providing a tax-deductible gift to the AAO-HNS Foundation to support the CORE research grants. You can find more information by visiting www.entnet.org and clicking on Donate Now in the lower right corner. Naming opportunities for CORE grants are available with a minimum gift commitment of $12,000. We also invite you to consider becoming a member of the AAO-HNS Foundation Legacy Circle by including a bequest for the Foundation's research programs in your will. Please contact Bob Olson, Senior Director of Development, at 1-703-535-3716 or development@entnet.org for details.

**CORE societies: American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF), American Academy of Facial Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS), American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy Foundation (AAOAF), American Head and Neck Society (AHNS), American Hearing Research Foundation (AHRF), American Laryngological Association (ALA), American Neurotology Society (ANS), American Rhinologic Society (ARS), American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology (ASPO), Deafness Research Foundation (DRF), Plastic Surgery Educational Foundation (PSEF), and the Triological Society*