ABSTRACT

Aims and Objectives:
To assess and create awareness of oral medicine specialty among medical practitioners, and to assess the volume of oral medicine clinical cases that they come across in their routine practice and to whom they refer them to.

Materials and Methods:
Printed and validated questionnaires were given to a sample of 250 medical practitioners of different specialties personally in and around Nagpur City and the results were analyzed. Chi Square test was performed to analyze the responses.

Results
Sixty-nine percent of medical practitioners were not aware of oral medicine specialty and only 31% were aware of it ($p<0.05$). Frequent incidence of oral manifestation of systemic diseases, occasional incidence of facial and TMJ pain, oral mucosal lesions, and rare incidence of salivary gland disorders were noted in their routine practice. Oral manifestation of systemic diseases and oral mucosal lesions were frequently being referred to a general dentist and not to any specific specialty. TMJ and facial pain were referred to an ENT specialist and salivary gland problems to a general surgeon commonly.

Conclusion:
It is time to reiterate and spread the awareness among the medical professionals about oral medicine specialty in diagnosis and management of many oral ailments. Proper diagnosis and medical management should be the preferred line of therapy for any ailment.

Keywords:
Facial pain, medical practitioners, oral medicine specialty, oral mucosal lesions, salivary gland disorders
Introduction

Recently, there has been an outburst of knowledge all around the globe, which has led to many specializations and super specializations in all branches of study, and dentistry is no exemption to this. But awareness of the specializations in dentistry among the public and medical fraternity in India is very low. A multidisciplinary approach toward the complete healthcare of a patient is the talk of the moment. It is observed that in most of the diseases, including certain oral conditions, the first contact for most of the patients is usually with a general medical practitioner.\[1\]

The gap between the integration of medical and dental care in our country is quite evident, and requires the attention of both the faculties.\[2,3\] Oral Medicine and Radiology specialty focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of oral mucosal lesions, treatment of medically compromised dental patients, and maxillofacial, oral, and dental imaging.\[4\]

The current study was an extension to our pilot survey conducted amongst the medical practitioners in Nagpur City considered to be the medical hub in central India. We casually quizzed some medical professionals among our relatives, we were taken aback to note that many of them were not aware of the oral medicine specialty. This revelation was the trigger which set us to foray into this survey.

Materials and Methods

Printed and validated questionnaires [Figure 1] were given personally to a sample of 250 medical practitioners of different specialties in and around Nagpur, who had optimum flow of outpatients and inpatients.

Results were tabulated using Microsoft Excel 2010 and frequency tabulation was done. Chi-square test was performed to evaluate the data. P<0.05 was considered to be significant.

Results

Chart 1 shows the awareness levels of oral medicine specialty among medical practitioners. Among 250 study subjects, only 77 (31%) were aware of the specialty and the remaining 173 (69%) were not aware of the specialty in dentistry. The result showed that a significant population were unaware about oral medicine specialty in dentistry. (p<0.05)

Chart 2 shows the incidence of oral medicine specialty cases among the medical practitioners in their routine day-to-day practice. Among 250 subjects interviewed, 44% reported frequent incidence, 37% reported occasional incidence, and 19% reported rare incidence of oral manifestations of systemic diseases in their practice.

Among the 250 subjects interviewed, 35% reported frequent incidence, 48% reported occasional incidence, and 17% reported rare incidence of facial and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) pain. Also, of all the subjects interviewed, 32% reported frequent incidence, 44% reported occasional incidence, and 24% reported rare incidence of oral mucosal lesions in their practice.

Of the total number of subjects interviewed, 18% reported frequent incidence, 39% reported occasional incidence, and 43% reported rare incidence of salivary gland disorders in their routine practice.
Figure 1: Survey Proforma

Chart 3 shows the specialty to which the medical practitioners refer cases with different oral conditions. The 250 subjects interviewed referred 59%, 24%, and 17% of cases with oral manifestations of systemic diseases to a general dentist, general medicine specialist, and general

Chart 1: (Fig.2) Awareness levels of oral medicine specialty among medical practitioners
Chart 2: (Fig.3) Incidence of oral medicine specialty cases among the medical practitioners in their routine day-to-day practice

Chart 3: (Fig.4) Specialty to which the medical practitioners refer cases with different oral conditions

Discussion

As William Osler said, “Mouth is the mirror of general health.”[5] Poor oral conditions may adversely affect general health and certain medical conditions may have a negative impact on oral health.[6] Dental and medical practitioners both form integral parts of a comprehensive healthcare team. However, the existence of such team work in India is actually questionable. There is a generalized lack of dental awareness among the medical practitioners.[7,8] Some of the earlier studies have shown that a lack of the general medical practitioners' knowledge of oral diseases contributes to delays in referral and treatment.[9] Results of our study also reveal that a majority of the medical practitioners do see a reasonable number of patients with oral ailments and refer them to a general dentist and not to any specific specialty.

We also found that there was a general reluctance by medical practitioners to participate in the study, which was evident during the personal interviews.

A study performed by Sarumathi et al. in Chennai city to examine the level of awareness of common oral diseases among primary care physicians showed moderate awareness among them about the signs and symptoms of the common oral diseases. However, there was a low awareness about the treatment of certain diseases under the purview of oral medicine, such as limited mouth opening and white patches.[10] This is not such an encouraging scenario for the specialists in Oral Medicine and Radiology and calls for some serious introspection and a need to increase the awareness of our fellow medical practitioners in this regard.[11] To the best of our knowledge, this is probably the only such study done in this region, which exclusively aimed to assess and create awareness about Oral Medicine and Radiology specialty among medical practitioners. The findings of this study reveal that there is a lack of integration between the medical and dental services in this region of India. The overall health of a population can be ensured only if the medical and dental professionals work as a team.

Conclusion

The results of the study clearly demonstrate poor awareness levels about oral medicine specialty among the medical practitioners.

The study also shows the prevalence of a considerable volume of oral medicine specialty cases in the population, thereby showing definitive scope to have an exclusive oral medicine specialty practice.
It is time to reiterate and spread the awareness among the medical professionals about the key and pivotal role played by the oral medicine specialist in diagnosis and management of many oral ailments. Most of the general physicians are one group of providers who have an opportunity to encourage oral health and to make a significant difference because of their access to families as a family physician which helps in spreading the awareness of oral medicine specialty among the public also.

It is also incumbent upon medical practitioners to keep their knowledge updated with time and get actively involved in oral health, as mouth is a mirror of systemic conditions.

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**Conflicts of interest**
There are no conflicts of interest.

**References**


