

# WORKING TO IMPROVE ORAL HEALTH CARE FOR CANCER PATIENTS

*Initiatives being taken at the Shizuoka Cancer Center*

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Currently, I and my colleague Toru Eguchi, from Sunstar's New Development Laboratory are making good progress in our joint-research project for the Shizuoka Cancer Center to analyze the changes that oral care can bring over time in bacterial flora in the mouth in cases of patients with oral cancer.

The research content corresponds to the theme Dr. Yojiro Ohta, chief of the Dentistry and Oral Surgery Division of the Shizuoka Cancer Center Hospital, spoke about last year at a symposium sponsored by the Sunstar Foundation For Oral Health Promotion, which was held in Kyoto. Simply stated, when an oral cancer is excised, saliva containing a large number of bacteria (1ml of saliva contains approximately 1 billion bacteria) comes into contact with the incision site. Infections following surgery, such as those that come from injured areas and pneumonia, can easily occur. In fact, the normal postoperative rate of infection is approximately 40% to 60%. However, the new oral care approach introduced at the Shizuoka Cancer Center that is implemented prior to surgery has reduced the risk of post-operative complications by approximately one-seventh. One of the goals of this project is to clarify the extent of the contribution that pre- and post-operative oral care makes, as well as to better identify the types of oral bacteria and changes in the number of these bacteria.

Mr. Eguchi and I are resident researchers at the Shizuoka Cancer Center, where Dr. Ohta heads the research team. We examine bacteria found in patients' saliva with a microscope and separate a large number of bacteria grown through its cultivation, which are then sent for further analysis to the Sunstar Inc. Head Office in Osaka. The research department at the Head Office determines the bacterial species by using techniques such as genetic test-

in the samples taken from patients. Until then I had only seen them in books.

I was very surprised to see the extremely poor oral condition of the three oral cancer patients that we observed. The saying "seeing is believing" is quite fitting. After witnessing the suffering of patients, I am now better able to sympathize with their pain and distress, and I can now better understand their urgent need for future product development to assist them in their struggle.

Our research results to date have shown that certain species of bacteria dominate during pre- and post-operative oral care and for some time after the operation. When that information was shared with a number of the medical specialists at the Center, including Dr. Ohta and hospital director Dr. Omagari, head of the Infectious Disease Department, these doctors showed a great deal of interest and applauded our efforts.

Our stay here at the Shizuoka Cancer Center has been a wonderful, stimulating experience, from the clinical experiences and the joint research carried out with the doctors, to the interactions we had with the patients. Based on the results of this collaborative

research, we hope to make use of this experience to develop evidence-based oral care products tailored to each patient's condition.

## COMMITTED TO SUPERB PATIENT CARE

One of the great things about the Shizuoka Cancer Center is the commitment to care shown by the staff toward patients. I can certainly understand why it was ranked number-one by patients in the authoritative publication "Best Hospitals in Japan." It has an efficient medical team and is popular with patients because its doctors are thorough in their efforts to lessen patients' suffering. Patients are by no means passive in front of medical doctors, as is often the case in Japan, and there is equality among the team members, which includes doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and dental hygienists.

Dr. Yamaguchi, the hospital's director, once stated at a staff meeting, "At a hospital, 100 minus 1 does not equal 99; subtracting one from 100 equals zero." He meant that if even one member of the staff out of 100 acts without thinking of the patient, trust in the Cancer Center will deteriorate and crumble. \*



Shizuoka Cancer Center doctors and Sunstar researchers discuss the good progress of their joint research.