



Letter to the Editor

Post-operative Care for Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma Patients: A Concerning Reality

 **Rahul Anand**,¹  **Gargi S. Sarode**,¹  **Namrata Sengupta**,¹  **Sachin C. Sarode**^{1,2}

¹Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology, Dr DY Patil Dental College and Hospital, Dr DY Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune, India

²Dr DY Patil Unitech Society's, Dr DY Patil Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research, Pimpri Pune, India

Cite This Article: Anand R, Sarode GS, Sengupta N, Sarode SC. Post-operative Care for Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma Patients: A Concerning Reality. EJMO 2023;7(4):404–406.

Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma or Oral Cancer (OC), a multifaceted and relentless adversary, strikes at the very core of an individual's health, well-being, and livelihood. As medical science advances, so does our understanding of the complexities surrounding this malignancy, encompassing not only the intricate web of post-operative care but also the vital contributions of caregivers and the distressing burden of financial strain.^[1, 2] OC, a formidable subgroup of head and neck cancers, encompasses malignancies of the lips, tongue, mouth, and throat.^[3] Characterized by diverse etiological factors including tobacco and alcohol use, human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, and genetic predisposition, oral cancer exerts a significant toll on global health.^[4] Its clinical manifestations often remain concealed until advanced stages, rendering early detection and treatment an uphill battle. Surgical interventions emerge as central to curative strategies, aiming to excise tumor masses while preserving critical functions like speech, swallowing, and facial aesthetics.^[5] However, these surgical endeavours set the stage for an arduous journey of recovery.

Post-operative care forms the cornerstone of the convalescence process after oral cancer surgery. The surgical battlefield transforms into a canvas that demands meticulous attention to detail, encompassing pain management, wound care, dietary adjustments, and psychological support. Pain,

an unwelcome companion, can debilitate patients, hindering their engagement in vital activities. Effective pain management strategies, ranging from pharmacological interventions to complementary therapies, are paramount in enabling patients to regain their vitality.^[5] Wound care assumes a pivotal role, warding off the risk of infections that can compromise the surgical outcome. Surgical site infections are a significant source of morbidity, extended hospitalisations, and mortality in patients undergoing surgery for OCs.^[6] The intricacies of hygiene maintenance take on heightened significance, as surgical alterations necessitate cautious and precise attention to prevent complications. Dietary adjustments, another critical dimension, require collaboration between patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers to ensure optimal nutrition while accommodating therapeutical challenges in swallowing and chewing.^[7] Furthermore, the psychological toll of facing mortality, altered body image, and functional limitations demands a comprehensive approach, intertwining medical care with psychological support.

Within this intricate framework, caregivers emerge as unsung heroes, casting a profound impact on the patient's journey through the labyrinth of post-operative care. Caregivers, often family members or close friends, shoulder a multifaceted role that encompasses physical assistance, medication vigilance, emotional solace, and advocacy

Address for correspondence: Rahul Anand, MD. Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology, Dr DY Patil Dental College and Hospital, Dr DY Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune, India

Phone: +919665058393 **E-mail:** rahul.anand303@gmail.com; rahul.anand@dpu.edu.in

Submitted Date: November 17, 2023 **Accepted Date:** November 29, 2023 **Available Online Date:** December 29, 2023

©Copyright 2023 by Eurasian Journal of Medicine and Oncology - Available online at www.ejmo.org

OPEN ACCESS This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.



within the healthcare realm. Their unwavering commitment provides a lifeline to patients, enhancing adherence to post-operative protocols while nurturing emotional well-being. Caregivers stand as living testimonials to the power of human resilience and compassion, offering a steady hand to guide patients through the tumultuous waters of recovery. The journey through oral cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery is an arduous one, laden with physical, emotional, and psychological challenges. Within this challenging landscape, caregivers and family members emerge as indispensable pillars of support, playing a multifaceted role that transcends mere assistance. Their presence and contributions weave a tapestry of care, empathy, and strength that profoundly impact the patient's experience and outcomes.^[8]

Caregivers and family members are the bedrock of physical assistance. They aid patients in daily activities that might become daunting post-surgery, such as dressing, grooming, and mobility. Caregivers also assume the role of advocates, accompanying patients to medical appointments, ensuring that medical instructions are understood and followed, and clarifying concerns with the healthcare team. This advocacy ensures that the patient's voice is heard and that their needs are met within the healthcare system.

After oral cancer surgery, a complex regimen of medications is often prescribed, ranging from pain management to antibiotics and other post-operative therapies. Caregivers are entrusted with the responsibility of administering medications at the right time, in the correct dosage, and as per the medical team's instructions. This role is crucial in preventing complications and ensuring the patient's comfort.^[8]

The emotional toll of oral cancer and its treatment cannot be underestimated. Caregivers and family members provide an essential source of emotional solace, offering a safe space for patients to express their fears, anxieties, and frustrations. Their unwavering presence and willingness to listen foster a sense of connection and belonging, mitigating the isolation that often accompanies illness.

Understanding the intricacies of oral cancer treatment, post-operative care, and potential side effects can be overwhelming for patients. Caregivers take on the role of educators, translating medical jargon into understandable terms, and facilitating informed decision-making. Clear communication between the healthcare team and caregivers ensures that the patient's needs and concerns are effectively addressed.

A supportive environment is conducive to healing. Caregivers and family members create a positive atmosphere that promotes the patient's mental and emotional well-being.

Small gestures of encouragement, maintaining a hopeful outlook, and engaging in activities that bring joy contribute to the patient's overall quality of life.

The financial strain that often accompanies oral cancer treatment can be overwhelming. Caregivers and family members help navigate the complexities of insurance, financial assistance programs, and budgeting. They may also assist in managing daily practicalities, such as household tasks and managing appointments, allowing the patient to focus on their recovery.^[2]

The patient's journey extends beyond the immediate post-operative phase. Caregivers and family members play a vital role in ensuring adherence to rehabilitation plans, which may include speech therapy, physiotherapy, and dietary adjustments. Their encouragement and assistance facilitate the patient's gradual return to a semblance of normalcy.

Amid their caregiving role, caregivers and family members also encourage patients to engage in self-care. This includes fostering independence when possible, motivating patients to participate in their care decisions, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices that support recovery.

In conclusion, the battle against Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma or Oral Cancer is a multidimensional struggle that impacts every facet of an individual's life. This formidable adversary strikes at the core of health, well-being, and livelihood, demanding a comprehensive and compassionate approach. As medical understanding advances, it is evident that the journey through oral cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery is a challenging one, often fraught with physical, emotional, and psychological hurdles. In this intricate landscape, caregivers and family members emerge as unsung heroes, providing essential support that goes beyond physical assistance.

Disclosures

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

Authorship Contributions: Concept – R.A., S.S.; Design – S.S., G.S.; Supervision – S.S.; Materials – R.A., N.S.; Data collection &/or processing – N.S.; Analysis and/or interpretation – R.A.; Literature search – N.S., G.S.; Writing – R.A., S.S.; Critical review – G.S.

References

1. Warnakulasuriya S. Global epidemiology of oral and oropharyngeal cancer. *Oral Oncol* 2009;45:309–16.
2. Anand R, Pandiar D, Kamboj M. Financial burden of oral squamous cell carcinoma in India. *Oral Oncol* 2020;103:104528.
3. Ferlay J, Colombet M, Soerjomataram I, Mathers C, Parkin DM, Piñeros M, et al. Estimating the global cancer incidence and

- mortality in 2018: GLOBOCAN sources and methods. *Int J Cancer* 2019;144:1941–53.
4. Coelho KR. Challenges of the oral cancer burden in India. *J Cancer Epidemiol* 2012;2012:701932.
 5. Omura K. Current status of oral cancer treatment strategies: Surgical treatments for oral squamous cell carcinoma. *Int J Clin Oncol* 2014;19:423–30.
 6. Balagopal PG, Suresh S, Nath SR, Sagila SG, George NA. Pattern of post-operative infections among oral cavity cancer patients in a tertiary care cancer centre: A prospective study. *Indian J Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg* 2022;74:2002–7.
 7. Nguyen NP, Moltz CC, Frank C, Vos P, Smith HJ, Karlsson U, et al. Dysphagia following chemoradiation for locally advanced head and neck cancer. *Ann Oncol* 2004;15:383–8.
 8. Frambes D, Given B, Lehto R, Sikorskii A, Wyatt G. Informal caregivers of cancer patients: Review of interventions, care activities, and outcomes. *West J Nurs Res* 2018;40:1069–97.