Your patients? Dr Austin, could you tell our readers the reason you decided to offer free HIV tests to dental practices on 57th Street in New York, to speak about HIV testing in her practice and how such testing could help to create a heightened awareness of the disease amongst patients.

According to the latest figures from the United Nations Organisation UNAIDS, more than 34 million people worldwide are currently living with the HIV virus. Since it can take up to ten years before progressing to AIDS, early testing can be a life-saving factor. New tests for HIV checks in dental practices have recently been developed. Dental Tribune Asia Pacific met with Dr Catrise Austin, who maintains a dental practice on 57th Street in New York City, to speak about HIV testing in her practice and how such testing could help to create a heightened awareness of the disease amongst patients.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific: Dr Austin, could you tell us why you decided to offer free HIV tests to your patients?

Dr Catrise Austin: The idea for offering free HIV tests to my patients arose earlier this year when I had learnt that doctors other than medical doctors can offer HIV testing in their practices. I said to myself why not add another service to our existing checklist of services or cavities and give patients the opportunity to know their status in a different setting. I saw this as a unique way to introduce the test to a patient in a dental setting. I tell them every time that the test is very easy to apply without making the patient feel uncomfortable. I guess that like most new ideas it takes some getting used to, but it will be successful because we are helping to save people’s lives. So, we hope to get more dentists all over the world interested in offering the test.

Unfortunately, I often encounter scepticism from some of my colleagues about the comfort level and the way to introduce the test to a patient in a dental setting. I tell them every time that the test is very easy to apply without making the patient feel uncomfortable. I guess that like most new ideas it takes some getting used to, but it will be successful because we are helping to save people’s lives. So, we hope to get more dentists all over the world interested in offering the test.

We are fully trained and prepared in case a test is positive. If a patient tests positive, we counsel him or her immediately and help him or her call their primary health physician to schedule a confirmatory test. It is important to note that the test that we offer is a screening test only and not a confirmed test. If a patient does not have a physician, we usually refer him or her to one of the clinics in the New York City area with which we have a partnership.

There are thousands of people in the US and more around the world who are unaware that they are HIV/AIDS infected. Do you think that regular checks in dental practices could help to create more awareness of the disease?

That is something I would like to see happening as more dentists begin administering the test. It is time to recognise that we should be concerned with the patient’s holistic health not only his or her oral health.

I am the first dentist in New York to offer the test and I would love to be the trail-blazer and help to make the test the standard of care in dental practices around the world. The greatest joy for me is when a patient says that he or she would have never undergone this test if it were not for me.

Thank you very much for the interview.

“HIV tests should be offered in every dental practice” An interview with Dr Catrise Austin, VIP Smiles, New York

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