



The Oral Cavity and Overall Health

An ever-accumulating body of evidence has identified certain systemic diseases, conditions, and behavioral factors that play important etiological roles in the development and perpetuation of periodontal disease. In addition, recent findings have provided compelling evidence regarding the impact of periodontal disease on the overall health of the individual. Therefore, numerous investigations are currently underway and more are being planned by health care professionals working at every level to extend our knowledge of oral infections and systemic diseases, and also to clarify the relationships between them.

Because periodontal and systemic health are inextricably intertwined, dental education must provide proper role models so that dental students can see first-hand how a skilled clinician can incorporate a medical approach into the treatment of patients. Researchers in periodontology have used periodontal disease as a model for inflammation and to develop drugs capable of supporting bone growth or preventing bone loss. Therefore, in order to deliver quality care at the lowest possible cost, dentistry must be evaluated not only on its mechanical procedures but, more importantly, on how we can justifiably incorporate newer therapeutic modalities into our practices. In other words, periodontics and medicine will be working ever more closely to provide real meaning for the concept of total patient care.

Because dentistry is both a science and an art, it is the obligation of the clinician to combine these 2 components in order to provide patients with the most effective care possible. It has been

a goal of *Quintessence International* to assist dental care providers in becoming more familiar with risk assessment and disease management. Being able to screen patients for risk factors and to accurately place them into low-, medium-, and high-risk groups is key to developing appropriate disease management and primary care strategies. The risk assessment–disease management model of diagnosis is, in fact, an application of a standard medical model in which the disease is identified and controlled, then followed by a rehabilitation or repair phase.

The use of risk assessment and disease management for periodontal diseases will be an increasingly useful diagnostic and patient management approach in the 21st century. Clearly, the technology of dentistry—cosmetics, materials, and restorative techniques—will continue to improve unabated. But such advances, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to meet the demands of modern dentistry. More extensive knowledge of periodontal and general medicine will be needed in order to more accurately assess risk, make appropriate decisions, render therapy, and monitor outcome.

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