

THE INSIDE STORY®

OCTOBER 2010 | GREENSHIELD.CA



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Pace makers, hearing aids, laser eye surgery – Technological innovation continues to touch us *literally* just about everywhere.

Open wide, because our mouths are no exception...

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Innovation for mind, body, soul—and mouth—it's everywhere. Although dental technologies are at the forefront of today's rapid pace of innovation, not all innovations are created equal. Dental innovations may seem new and exciting, that doesn't mean that they are necessarily new and *improved* ...or new and *efficacious* (the fancy word in the research world for how effective a certain treatment is at producing a desired effect). Plan sponsors need to rely on their health benefit plan providers to be savvy technology critics to help them not only critically examine new technologies, but also help them transform their plan members into informed technology consumers.

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Technological innovation continues to touch us

A case in point is using new visualization aids to help with screening for oral cancer—known in the dental world as “adjunctive screening aids”. Simply put, they are designed to help the dentist examine patients’ mouths more easily and more clearly.

Although many of the adjunctive aids have been on the international market for a few years with some now available in Canada, they hit our radar screen again this spring when we received questions from plan sponsors about their value in helping detect oral cancer. Indeed, their use for oral cancer screening has become a hot topic, receiving coverage in the May 2010 Journal of the American Dental

Association (JADA) paper, “Evidence-Based Clinical Recommendations Regarding Screening for Oral Squamous Cell Carcinomas”, and being featured as a topic at the American Association of Dental Consultants 2010 annual meeting.

All of this recent interest prompted us to sit down with **Dr. Zieba** to ask him his thoughts about these aids and their use for oral cancer screening. Having practiced community dentistry for over 30 years and having reviewed dental claims as a Green Shield Canada Dental Consultant for almost 10 years, Dr. Zieba certainly fits the bill for “Ask the Expert” status.

Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma:

cancer of the tissues in the mouth. For example, located on the roof or floor of the mouth, or on the tongue.

GSC: Good morning Dr. Zieba, I guess the tables have turned in that although you are used to asking patients the tough questions like how often they floss and so on, today I will be asking you the tough questions about the use of adjunctive screening aids for oral cancer screening... that’s a mouthful already!

Basically, we would like to provide our plan sponsors—and in turn, their plan members—with education about whether these aids enhance oral cancer screening.

Dr. Z: Great topic because as you know, the usefulness of these aids for oral cancer screening has been central to some recent debate.

So the quick answer is ‘no’...

‘No,’ the evidence does not confirm their usefulness in oral cancer screening...

In a nutshell, these aids do not necessarily enhance oral cancer screening, so using them—and billing for them—is in fact a duplication of what the dentist is already doing and billing for in terms of oral cancer screening.

GSC: Well, that certainly is definitive! But maybe you can provide us with some background regarding how you came to this conclusion...

Dr. Z: Sure, let me step back a bit so you can first see the bigger picture about oral cancer screening, which should help provide you with a better understanding of why this topic is in the news...



Here's the thing, oral cancer screening is nothing new—only some of the screening aids are new. Dentists have always been required to do a comprehensive oral cancer screening of each patient's mouth, whether a new patient or during a recall exam. So the first point is that conducting oral cancer screening is nothing new.

GSC: So oral cancer screening is an automatic part of a routine dental visit?

Dr. Z: Yes, exactly, it is already an integral part of established standards of dental care.

Which brings me to the second point, which is that oral cancer screening is also already built into the fees for both initial and recall examinations.

So with the typical examination, the dentist conducts a patient medical history including tobacco and alcohol use, and then conducts a very comprehensive oral cancer screening both visually and physically by looking and feeling around the patient's mouth for what are considered to be 'abnormalities'.

GSC: This is what dentists refer to as a visual and tactile examination, I think, right?

Dr. Z: You got it, the term visual and tactile examination is just dentist-lingo for saying that after taking the patient's medical history, then be sure to use your eyes as well as your sense of touch to check the patient's mouth for anything that looks or feels 'abnormal' that could then be considered 'suspicious'. This might be a cut, bump, or perhaps a dark area ...or white spots... really any sort of texture variation or discolouration.

GSC: And if you do see or feel something suspicious?

Dr. Z: Then as part of the dental standard, the dentist asks the patient to come back within 7 -14 days for a follow-up examination to check whether the abnormality is still there... and if it is still there, to check whether there has been any change to its appearance.

If the dentist still considers it 'suspicious', the next course of action is to discuss concerns with the patient and decide whether the situation warrants further investigation. Further investigation is usually in the form of a biopsy or referral to a specialist.

GSC: Okay, I get it so far, but getting back to the original question, what about the usefulness of these adjunctive oral cancer screening aids?

Dr. Z: The adjunctive aids are marketed as visualization aids to help the dentist view the inside of the mouth more easily and more clearly. And manufacturers claim they help the dentist visualize abnormalities that are not as easily detectable with conventional light found in a dentist's office.



In my role as a Dental Consultant, we have questioned the value of these aids in oral cancer screening since we started seeing them pop up a few years ago. Now, at the risk of sounding like I am tooting our own horn, based on the results of the JADA paper, it looks like we were right on track by questioning whether they are necessary or not.

GSC: Yes, results from the JADA paper state that, *“there is insufficient evidence that commercial devices based on autofluorescence or tissue reflectance enhance visual detection of potentially malignant lesions beyond that achieved through a conventional visual and tactile examination.”*

Dr. Z: Right, so in practical terms, what they are saying is that there is *insufficient evidence* that commercial devices, the so-called adjunctive screening aids, enhance oral cancer detection.

The broader message for both plan sponsors and plan members is around *evidence-based recommendations*. The reality is that although the future is bound to be filled with exciting technological advances that lead to important health benefits, it is critical that their health benefit provider makes sure that any new and *potentially beneficial* innovations are assessed using established scientific rigour on a case-by-case basis. As a Dental Consultant and as a health benefit specialist, that’s our job and it’s an important one.

GSC: Actually, your comments about the future reflect another point in the JADA article where it says, *“A number of promising new technologies have been proposed to improve the effectiveness of early oral cancer detection, including the use of saliva as an oral cancer screening platform...”* So what do you think about that? Have you heard about using saliva for oral cancer screening?”

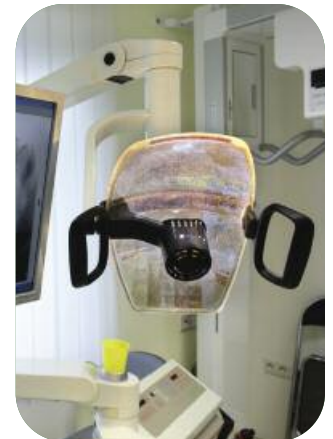
Dr. Z: Oh yes, for sure—the future application for saliva is definitely another hot topic, or I guess I should say “juicy” topic. As the ‘mirror of the body’, research continues to reveal the importance of using saliva as a diagnostic fluid. It can be used as a preventive measure to help monitor our health during regular health checks, and also for improving our ability to diagnose and treat a range of conditions – not just oral cancer. But we may need to leave that one for another day because if we fast-forward into the future, there may be a solid rationale for all kinds of new and *efficacious* technologies.

GSC: Well, I want to thank you for your time and just close by asking you one final question—what’s the bottom line in practical, day-to-day terms for what plan sponsors and plan members should do in terms of these oral cancer assistive adjunctive screening devices?

How the screening aids work:

Reflectance: Some types use what is known as reflectance by having the patient rinse with a mouth solution and then the dentist uses a special type of glow stick light to examine the mouth. Normal healthy tissue absorbs the light and appear dark, whereas abnormal tissue appears white.

Autofluorescence: Other types use what is known as autofluorescence by shining a special light into the patient’s mouth. Normal healthy tissue appears green when viewed through the light’s filter, whereas abnormal tissue appears darker.



Dr. Z: Overall, to put my money where my mouth is, just some dentist humour for you there, use of these aids for oral cancer screening is a duplication of the visual and tactile examination that is incorporated into both initial and recall exams.

And for plan members and patients, it's all about education. As dentists, we can work with plan sponsors to help educate plan members about the importance of *only* considering evidence-based care no matter what new assessment or treatment innovations they hear of out there.

For example, in terms of the oral cancer screening aids currently on the market, we can raise their awareness of what evidence currently exists—or in this case, doesn't yet exist.

'No' for now But stay tuned...

In terms of adjunctive oral screening aids, it's a 'no' for now, but stay tuned—although no one knows what the future holds, we do know that it will include critical examination to ensure the highest quality benefits plans and optimal plan member health. Good thing that as health benefits specialists, analysis is our version of a good time—a very good time.

Time to give your dentist a checkup!

Did you know that while your dentist is examining your mouth, he is also doing an oral cancer screening?

If you didn't realize this, it's probably because your dentist may not mention it because the word cancer can be scary for some people.

Next time you're in, check it out, because as part of every dental visit, your dentist should be keeping an eye out—and using his fingers—to look and feel around your mouth and tongue for anything that looks abnormal. For example, cuts or bumps, or changes in colour.

Nothing special needed...

Although there are products on the market that are sold as oral cancer screening aids—they are not necessary.

For oral cancer screening, all you need is your dentist's expertise in term of his trusty eyes and hands!



e-service success stories — *This could be you...*

Here's how the Direct Deposit of claims payments is life altering—well, at least it's how you get your money back fast...

"I must admit, when I signed up for Direct Deposit, I was skeptical—I had tried the Direct Deposit options with some household services and not only was it a hassle to set up, it took a while for it to get up and running smoothly. Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised when first off, setting up the Plan Member Online Services Direct Deposit option was simple—and then, there it was—my claim reimbursement deposited directly into my account. It was so much faster than waiting for cheques via snail mail."

This could be you—simply sign up for Plan Member Online Services and see how simple and convenient it is to set up Direct Deposit.



FOCUS ON LEGISLATION

Here we go again with drug reform... *More changes, different province*

British Columbia moves toward lowering generic drug prices

British Columbia has announced its drug reform plans. Currently, generic drug prices in British Columbia are approximately 65% of the brand-name drug cost. However, on July 9, 2010, the Province announced a three-year plan to phase in reduced prices for generic drugs for all residents, regardless of whether they are covered by private or public plans, or pay out-of-pocket. The new pricing was released on September 15, 2010 with implementation planned for October 15, 2010.

Here are the highlights...

New generic drug prices as a percentage of brand drug price:

| Date | Existing Generics | New Generics |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Current | 65% (average) | 50-70% |
| October 15, 2010 | 50% | 42% |
| July 4, 2011 | 40% | 40% |
| April 2, 2012 | 35% | 35% |

Pharmacare-only dispensing fee and mark-up schedule:

The dispensing fee and mark-up schedule only applies to payments made by Pharmacare. For private plans, the insurer or pharmacy benefit manager will continue to determine the dispensing fee and mark-up.

| Date | Dispensing Fee | Mark-up |
|------------------|----------------|---------|
| Current | \$9.10 | 7% |
| October 15, 2010 | \$9.60 | 8% |
| July 4, 2011 | \$10.00 | 8% |
| April 2, 2012 | \$10.50 | 8% |

As soon as we know, you'll know...

Now that we have the revised generic drug price list, we will be able to analyze potential savings by plan sponsor. For more information about

the changes, please visit <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/pharmacare/newsletter/>

British Columbia spends over \$900 million a year through Pharmacare with generic drugs accounting for \$286 million in 2008-2009.

Provincial differences...

While British Columbia reforms reduce generic drug price; the plan does not reduce or eliminate professional allowances. And in terms of savings due to the reform, the Province of British Columbia plans to re-invest in what they refer to as value add health services like new drugs to improve patient care and enhancing the role of pharmacists. In addition, the Province committed to enhancing their rural pharmacy program.

Plan-specific impact...

Although savings are anticipated for plan sponsors, it's too early to accurately determine the overall cost impact. The impact on plan sponsors will be very situation-specific depending on variables like:

- current mix of generic and brand drugs,
- stakeholder reaction in the British Columbia marketplace, and
- future market forces potentially affecting drug prices and plan costs in unexpected ways, such as the increasing utilization of biologics.

NEWS & EVENTS

We couldn't have done it without you... In a word, "Thanks"

A sincere thank you to all of you who took the time to participate in our 2010 Customer Satisfaction Surveys conducted by Market Probe Canada. We were pleased with

participation – and greatly appreciative of the feedback. It provides us with concrete information to guide future activities.



Out and About — Events you won't want to miss

Why not attend one of these upcoming industry events? You'll be glad you did – they are always packed with the latest and greatest industry news, interesting opinions from industry leaders, and loads of innovative ideas. Please also be sure to drop by our booth to say hello, we're always happy to see you:

■ September 29th – October 1st:

Health Work and Wellness

- Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vancouver, BC
- Visit <http://healthworkandwellness.com/conference/register> to register

■ October 4th – 6th:

CPBI Ontario

- White Oaks Conference Resort and Spa, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON
- Visit http://www.cpbi-icra.ca/en/event_details.ch2?event_id=909®ion_id=6 to register

■ October 27th – 29th:

CPBI Alberta

- Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff, Alberta
- Visit http://www.cpbi-icra.ca/en/event_details.ch2?event_id=951®ion_id=3 to register

Winner of the draw for a 'night out on the town'



Congratulations to **Debralee Edwards**, of Edmonton, AB, the winner of Green Shield Canada's monthly draw for gift certificates for a 'night out on the town'. Through this contest, one name will be drawn each month from plan members who have registered for Plan Member Online Services for that month. To learn more, visit greenshield.ca.

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CANADA

London 1-800-265-4429
Toronto 1-800-268-6613
Customer Service 1-888-711-1119

Vancouver 1-800-665-1494
Windsor 1-800-265-5615
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