

2 MINUTES TO SAVE A LIFE

You cannot do much in two minutes, but just two minutes is all it takes to perform a mouth or oral cancer exam. The American Cancer Society estimates that over 35,000 people will be diagnosed with oral cancer each year. In Maryland, each year almost 600 people are diagnosed with oral cancer and approximately 130 people die of the disease.

The survival rate for oral cancer, unlike most cancers, has changed little over the past fifty years despite advances in treating the disease. The main reason for this is that many people are diagnosed with oral cancer at a late stage. Individuals diagnosed in an early stage of the disease have a five-year survival rate of eighty percent or more. During 2003, 31.9% of oral cancer cases in Maryland were diagnosed at the early stage; 47.4% were diagnosed at the late stage.

In the 2006 Maryland Cancer Survey, 37% of individuals 40 years of age and older reported they had an oral cancer exam in the past year. So, what can you do? Take the extra two minutes to perform an oral cancer exam for each patient once a year. Notify your patients when they have had an oral cancer exam – they will appreciate it. Also, remind your colleagues about the importance of detecting oral cancer early.

The more health care providers look for oral cancer, the better chance that oral cancer will be found early and that lives will be saved. It only takes two minutes to save a life, why not do it?