



BRIGHT LIGHT— Dr. Ash Kler checks dental hygienist Lynn Tadgell's mouth for oral cancer with new developed-in-B.C. technology.

Tyler Garnham photo

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Two South Delta dentists are shining light on oral cancer.

Green light, that is.

Drs. Ash Kler and Ross Gorrell are taking part in a B.C. Cancer Agency study that makes use of the first technological advancement in detecting oral cancer in years.

It's called a velscope—technically, a direct fluorescence visualization tool—and it's an inconspicuous, sleek white box with a handheld attachment.

Dental hygienist Lynn Tadgell leans back in the dental chair at Nature's Design Dental Spa. Kler holds the velscope and shines a blue light into her mouth. A peek through the lens shows her mouth is fluorescent green.

Fluorescent green means healthy tissues. The screening is simple and non-invasive—there are no whining drills or distasteful rinses.

After a bit of extra training, Kler and Gorrell can now use the tool to detect potential problem areas at oral cancer's earliest stages. The pre-cancerous or cancerous tissue does not glow fluorescent green; instead, it absorbs the light and appears black.

"There are several layers of cancer development. The velscope can pick up the very first level of change," says Kler. "At that level the survival rate is very high."

Oral cancer is much more common than cervi-

Diagnostic tool

Oral cancer technology gets green light

cal cancer in Canada, and it's an aggressive cancer if not caught early, says Kler.

And for reasons he can only speculate, the risk groups for oral cancer are no longer mainly stereotypical drinking, smoking males over 40. It's affecting more women, and more non-smokers and non-drinkers.

Gorrell says people should get checked for oral cancer by their dentist once a year, or if signs like a sore, or red or white spot persists for more than two to three weeks.

He brings out a picture of an open mouth under the velscope, where there appears a large circle of black. To the naked eye they can see it's a potential problem area, but with the velscope the border of the cancerous area is more obvious.

Prior to the velscope, they would remove a

tumor and an excess border of tissue as a safety precaution. With the velscope, they can see more precisely what tissue must be removed, reducing the chance of the cancer returning.

The additional training is needed to distinguish the potentially cancerous spots from dark marks that are nothing to worry about—they might be inflammation or a burn from that extra hot pizza slice.

Dentists still conduct a visual examination and feel the lymph nodes, but previously Kler and Gorrell used dyes or rinses on areas of concern. Now, they can simply shine a light to see if a spot needs further study, something that's easy to get a patient to agree to.

The technology for the velscope was developed by scientists at the B.C. Cancer Agency, and is now being used all over the world.

But although the technology has spread, it's not yet a common sight in dental practices—Kler guesses one per cent in B.C. have one—because it's only been readily available for about a year (Health Canada approval the technology in spring 2006).

Kler and Gorrell want to raise public awareness of the velscope and of oral cancer. During Dental Health Month in April, they hope to organize a free day of oral cancer screening for the community so residents can have the light turned on them.

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business

bizbits

Movie nights

This summer, you can watch your favorite movie stars—under the stars. The Tsawwassen Business Improvement Association announced earlier this month that they'll host three outdoor movie nights in July and August. And they're not just any movies—the BIA will choose films shot in Tsawwassen to give viewers some "local Hollywood flavour." The shows will be screened July 19, August 2 (the weekend of the Sun Festival) and August 30 at places like Winskill Park and the Tsawwassen Town Centre Mall parking lot. As more details are confirmed they'll be posted at www.shoptsavwassen.com.