STIRLING, UK: A recent survey conducted by the British Dental Association (BDA) has found that a Scottish government initiative to potentially extend the time between dental appointments to 24 months has caused concern among Scottish dentists regarding possible delayed diagnosis of oral cancer.

Earlier this year, the Scottish government launched the Oral Health Improvement Plan, which outlines, among other things, a focus on improving prevention, reducing oral health inequalities, and meeting the needs of an ageing population. Though the BDA welcomed these ambitions, it expressed dismay that the plan recommends that certain patients with good oral health should only attend dental check-ups once every two years. A subsequent BDA survey of Scottish dentists found that 97 per cent of respondents are concerned that these extensions of recall intervals could undermine the detection of oral cancers, which 77 per cent regarded as a major or severe risk.

Scotland has seen a 37 per cent increase in oral cancer deaths over the past decade, and incidence rates are among the highest in Europe. Though it is primarily caused by smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and human papilloma-virus infections, oral cancer can also occur in individuals leading generally healthy lifestyles. Given that survival rates for oral cancer improve from 50 per cent to 90 per cent with early detection, regular check-ups are essential.

Dr David Cross, Vice Chair of the BDA’s Scottish Council, said: “Dentists are on the front line of a battle against some of the fastest rising cancers in Scotland. Early detection is key, but now risks becoming a casualty of a cost-cutting exercise.”

“People in otherwise good health are succumbing to this disease. Telling our ‘lower risk’ patients to come back in two years will only handicap efforts to meet a growing threat, while putting further pressure on NHS cancer services,” he continued.

“Oral cancer now claims three times as many lives in Scotland as car accidents. Rather than chasing quick savings we need to see concrete plans and real investment to help turn the tables on this devastating but preventable disease,” Cross advised.
Majority of children perceive loss of first tooth positively

By DTI

ZURICH, Switzerland: Although losing primary teeth can be unsettling and painful for children, an interdisciplinary research group at the University of Zurich (UZH) has now found that children’s feelings towards this experience are predominantly positive. The study also established that previous visits to the dentist, as well as parental background and level of education, affect how children experience the loss of their first tooth.

Children generally lose their first primary tooth when they are about 6 years old. This gradual process is probably one of the first biological changes to their own bodies that children experience consciously. The emotions that accompany this milestone are extremely varied, ranging from joy at having finally joined the world of grown-ups to fear about the loss of a body part.

An interdisciplinary team of researchers at UZH, in cooperation with the City of Zurich’s school dental services, has examined the feelings that children experience when they lose their first primary tooth and what factors play a role. The scientists surveyed parents of children who had already lost at least one of their primary teeth. Of the nearly 1,500 responses received, around 80 per cent of parents reported positive feelings, while only 20 per cent told of negative emotions.

The researchers found that previous visits to the dentist played a role regarding children’s feelings. Those whose previous visits were cavity-related and thus perhaps associated with shame or guilt experienced fewer positive emotions when they lost their first primary tooth. If, however, previous dental appointments were the result of an accident, and thus an abrupt, unexpected and painful event, the loss of the first primary tooth was more likely to be associated with positive emotions. According to lead author Dr Raphael Patcas, from the Clinic of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry, one possible explanation for this is that primary teeth loosen gradually before falling out—a process that, unlike an accident, unfolds slowly and predictably. This is also supported by the finding that children who experience the loosening of a tooth over an extended period tend to have more positive feelings. The longer the preparation and waiting time, the greater the relief and pride when the tooth finally falls out.

Moreover, the study found that socio-demographic factors are related to children’s feelings. For example, children were more likely to have positive feelings such as pride or joy if their parents had a higher level of education and came from non-Western countries. The researchers indicate that cultural differences could be at play here. These include education style and norms that parents pass on to their children, as well as transitioning rituals that accompany the loss of the first baby tooth.

“Our findings suggest that children deliberately process previous experiences concerning their teeth and integrate them in their emotional development,” said study co-author Prof. Moritz Daum, from the institute of developmental psychology at the university. “This finding is important for dentists and parents alike—especially where cavities are concerned, it’s worth communicating with children proactively,” added Daum. “This way, emotions in connection with teeth and dentists can be put on the most positive trajectory possible.”

The study, titled “Emotions experienced during the shedding of the first primary tooth,” was published online on 13 September 2018 in the International Journal of Pediatric Dentistry ahead of inclusion in an issue.

New study links poor tooth-brushing habits to heart disease

CHICAGO, US/LONDON, UK: A new study presented during the 2018 American Heart Association Scientific Sessions held recently has suggested that brushing one’s teeth at least twice a day for at least 2 minutes may reduce one’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

In response, the Oral Health Foundation, a leading charity working to combat oral disease in the UK, stressed the importance of taking charge of one’s oral health, stating that it can provide benefits that go far beyond the mouth.

“Findings like this may sound slightly scary to hear but it could prove to be just the push we need to take better care of our oral health,” said Dr Nigel Carter, OBE, CEO of the Oral Health Foundation. “This study adds to the growing scientific evidence that this is a strong link between the health of our mouth and that of our body.”

“For many years, gum disease has been linked with conditions like strokes, diabetes, dementia, and pregnancy outcomes. These are all serious conditions that could impact on a person’s quality of life,” he continued.

“Looking after our mouth should be a priority every day and the benefits of doing so are simply too important to ignore,” Carter said.