United Concordia - Newsroom

CAMP HILL, Pa. (March 22, 2023) – It's estimated that1 in 5 adults suffer from sleep apnea, a serious sleep and breathing condition. During Sleep Awareness Month in March, United Concordia Dental is spotlighting the role of dentists in detecting sleep apnea in patients.

Research shows that poor sleep can affect a person's oral and overall health. According to a *Clinical Oral Investigations* study, sleep disorders are associated with a weakened immune system and higher levels of gum inflammation, which can lead to an increased risk of gum and heart disease. Additionally, sleep apnea accompanied by dry mouth boosts the risk for tooth decay and gum disease.

"Dentists are often the first line of defense in diagnosing sleep-related breathing disorders in patients," said Ed Shellard, DMD, president and CEO, United Concordia Dental. "Tooth grinding is usually the first sign of sleep apnea. When dentists see worn tooth surfaces and other oral health signs that point to this condition – like a small jaw, redness in the throat or a tongue with scalloped edges – they can refer these patients to a physician for a proper diagnosis."

People with certain risk factors, such as obesity, chronic nasal congestion and enlarged adenoids or tonsils, have a higher risk of developing sleep apnea. Recognizing sleep apnea side effects when they occur can help people know when to seek treatment. Common signs to watch for include loud snoring, gasping for air during sleep, dry mouth and periods of absent or reduced breathing.

A variety of treatment options are available for sleep apnea, including oral appliances, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines, other airway pressure devices and surgery. Simple lifestyle changes like quitting smoking, getting regular exercise, avoiding alcohol and treating allergies are effective ways to help reduce or prevent this sleeping condition.

"Research has shown that patients are more likely to see a dentist for an oral health examination than to schedule an annual checkup with a physician. This means that dental clinicians are often the first provider to detect systemic health conditions and communicate these findings to the patient," said Shellard.

To learn more about United Concordia, visit UnitedConcordia.com.

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