

In this Issue: Oral Health

Omar A. Khan, MD, MHS¹ and Timothy E. Gibbs, MPH, NPMc²

1. President-Elect, Delaware Academy of Medicine/Delaware Public Health Association
2. Executive Director, Delaware Academy of Medicine/Delaware Public Health Association

This issue of the Journal focuses on Oral Health – a discipline far broader than the dentistry most think of then they hear the term. According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research:

“Oral health means more than healthy teeth and the absence of disease. It involves the ability of individuals to carry out essential functions such as eating and speaking as well as to contribute fully to society.”

<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/SurgeonGeneral/sgr/part1.htm>

The mouth and adjacent areas (the craniofacial complex) can be a window to overall health, as well as the location where more systemic inflammation can begin in the form of manageable gingivitis and evolving to periodontitis. Periodontal disease is associated with poor oral health and has been linked to many serious medical conditions, including:

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Pre-term Labor
- Low-birth Weight
- Breast Cancer
- Pancreatic Disease
- Diabetes

The Mayo Clinic lists a variety of risk factors that can contribute or increase risk of periodontitis including:

- Gingivitis
- Poor oral health habits
- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Older age
- Hormonal changes, such as those related to pregnancy or menopause
- Substance abuse
- Obesity
- Inadequate nutrition, including vitamin C deficiency
- Genetics
- Certain medications that cause dry mouth or gum changes

- Conditions that cause decreased immunity, such as leukemia, HIV/AIDS and cancer treatment
- Certain diseases, such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/periodontitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20354473>

Just as any other health issue, oral health is impacted by the social determinants of health, access to care, and oral health literacy. Ultimately, oral health is at the core of dentistry, which is integral to systemic health, and the American Dental Association (ADA) definition highlights the broad scope of Dentistry:

The evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body.

As a result of the essential dental-medical connection, the Delaware Academy of Medicine and the Delaware State Dental Society come together on an annual basis to explore this intersection of disciplines through the Frank M. and Robert R. Hoopes Medical/Dental Lecture held in January of each year. This year, we are pleased to have Louis G. Mercuri, D.D.S., M.S. presenting on “Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Facts and Foibles.”

We are especially pleased to have Delaware Academy of Medicine president, Daniel J. Meara, M.D., D.M.D. as the guest editor for this issue of the Journal.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Journal, and welcome your feedback and comments

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