



Take a Minute to Save a Life!

The Interview

In order to complete an exam on a client the clinician must first obtain a thorough and complete medical and dental history. At Vancouver College of Dental Hygiene Ltd. (VCDH) we were taught the client's medical and dental history is a crucial step, as this disclosed information assists us to be able to provide safe and effective care. Critical information such as a client's medications, medical conditions, oral habits, and lifestyle choices such as smoking and drinking habits are just a few examples of the pertinent information that is obtained. This preliminary information also allows us to pre-screen clients to see if they are at an increased risk for oral cancer. Some risk factors that may increase the risk for oral cancer include: tobacco use, alcohol consumption, sun exposure, and diet.



A VCDH student looks upon as another student learns how to use the VELscope during a presentation.

The E/O and I/O Exam

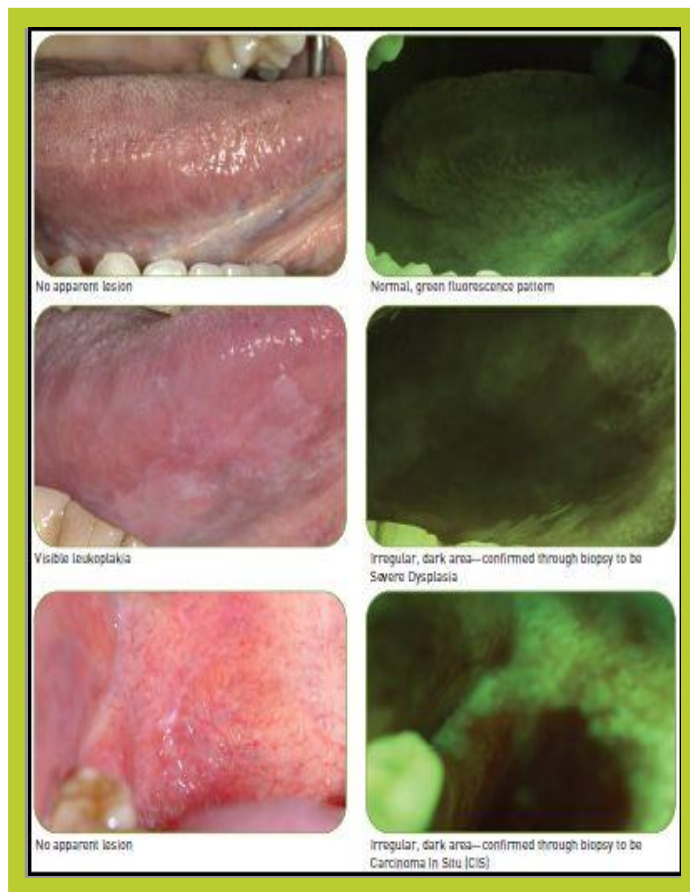
The next step is to complete an extraoral and intraoral exam to inspect for any abnormalities. It is just as important to do a complete extraoral and intraoral exam on each and every client at every appointment, as it is to update the medical history. In order to have the best survival rate for oral cancer it must be found in its early stages. Unfortunately, due to the fact there isn't pain always associated with cancerous lesion, they can go unnoticed and undetected for some time. One tool that can assist in finding the ominous lesion is the VELscope. The VELscope can make the difference between life and death, when used as an adjunct during a conventional intraoral exam.

The VELscope Defined

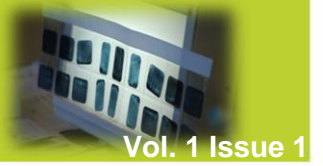
The VELscope is a handheld device that emits a safe fluorescent blue light into the oral cavity. This light in turn excites the molecules in the oral tissues causing the tissue to fluoresce. The VELscope is used to detect viral, bacterial, fungal infections, inflammation; and is utilized as an adjunct to detect cancerous and pre-cancerous tissues. A special optical filtering device allows the clinician to immediately view the tissues; healthy tissue is an apple green color, an orange color is indicative of fungal or bacterial colonization, and a dark color indicates abnormal tissue. (2)

Stats

The survival rate for cancer of the head and neck is fifty percent but if caught early this number can be reduced to thirty percent. According to BC Cancer Agency, in British Columbia alone, 457 people were diagnosed with oral cancer in 2009 and 167 may die from it. (3) These numbers can be reduced drastically by implementing an intraoral and extraoral cancer screening within the routine dental exam. Moreover, oral cancer detection can be further enhanced by implementing the use of a handheld detection device called VELscope during an intraoral exam.



The pictures illustrated on the left show the tongue under white light, compared to the pictures on the right exemplify the same area viewed with a VELscope. (1)

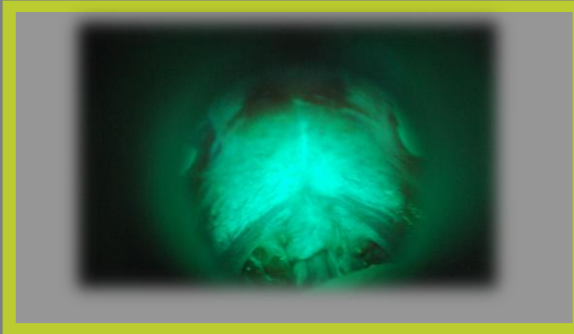


VCDH and the VELscope

The Vancouver College of Dental Hygiene Inc. (VCDH) is the only dental hygiene college in BC that has implemented the VELscope within clinical settings. VCDH students have been given the opportunity to utilize the VELscope as an adjunct to the basic intraoral exam, thus being able to complete a thorough oral cancer screening exam for all clients.

In conclusion, we have enjoyed being able to implement the use of the VELscope as an adjunct to the traditional white light intra-oral cancer screening. The VELscope was well accepted by our clients. As it was a non-invasive procedure, which didn't require any staining or additional rinses and took no more than a couple of minutes. Additionally, VELscope has received worldwide recognition by the World Health Organization as it states "it is an innovative device that addresses global health concerns and enhances oral health assessments." (4) We feel fortunate to have had these learning experiences. As it has not only enabled us to perform optimal care for our clients in clinic but has also provided us with the knowledge on how we can implement the VELscope in private practice upon graduation.

As future dental hygienists we now know.... not only can we clean teeth...but we can save lives!



The oropharynx viewed through the VELscope by a VCDH student

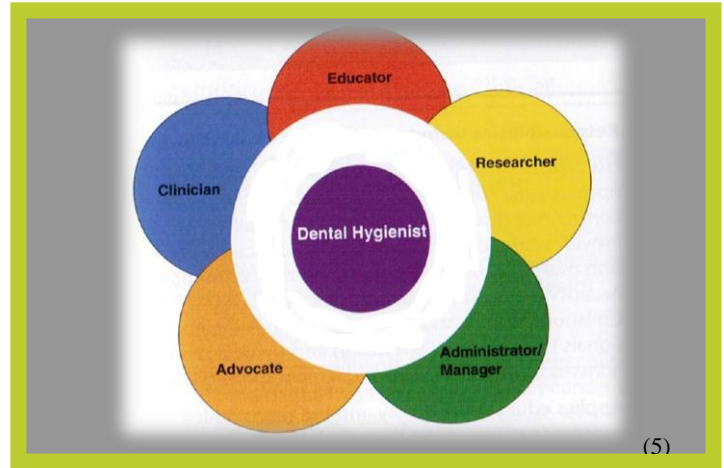
Testimonials made by Clients at VCDH:

"I am glad you have this here at your school, I feel like I got a complete exam and I am relieved to know everything in my mouth is okay and there is nothing for me to worry about"

"After receiving the results of the VELscope exam, it has made me re-evaluate my lifestyle choices and I am now in the process of quitting smoking"

"I am happy to have had the VELscope used during my exam; it has relieved my anxiety of my oral health"

"Having the abnormal lesion checked out on my tongue and know it is not cancerous provides much relief to me."



Educators in Our Community

During our first semester as dental hygiene students at VCDH, we were taught that dental hygiene does not have to strictly be a clinical profession. We found this very intriguing, because not only could we become clinicians, but we could also be administrators, educators, health promoters, researchers, advocates and change agents. Most of us thought that perhaps one day, after the completion of our dental hygiene diploma, we could explore these different facets of dental hygiene roles. However, the opportunity to explore these areas came a lot sooner. VCDH had integrated these broad spectrums of the dental hygiene profession throughout our four semesters. The following community placement experiences which are explained below are a few that we would like to share with you.

Educator and Health Promoter

We had the pleasure to be able to share our newly found expertise in oral self care to our surrounding communities. Many lesson plans were diligently prepared in order to effectively educate primary school children, high school students, adult ESL classes, senior facilities, prenatal and daycare centres and other target groups such as special needs clients. These teaching experiences allowed us to effectively interact with various communities which enabled us to educate them on their specific areas for their oral care needs. The reward was mutual, as evidenced by the many thank-you letters from the organizations and the smiles on our faces after lessons well taught.



Researcher

We have also learned that everything we teach or preach must be evidenced-based. Research is always being updated; therefore, we need to confirm the data we find is reliable, up-to-date and free of bias. We were put into designated groups and were given the opportunity to research specific topics such as smoking, oral cancer screening, HIV, oral piercings, radiation exposure, and the safety of amalgam usage and its relation to the oral cavity. Each group of students spent countless hours researching these topics in order to implement the most recent evidenced-based and informative table clinics. These table clinics were presented to the community at the Roundhouse Community Centre in Yaletown, Vancouver, and also at an open house held at VCDH. The presentations were free to the public and many family, friends, clients of VCDH, current and previous dental hygiene students, instructors and near-by neighbours, attended.

Advocate

We also volunteered our time and dental hygiene services (not intra-orally) to a non-profit dental organization, which provided dental hygiene and restorative dental treatments by donation. These treatments were offered to the lower-socio-economic populations who could not otherwise afford these treatments. Many registered local dentists, registered dental hygienists and certified dental assistants volunteered their services to this charitable clinic. We were very impressed with the generous supplies received, through continual donations from our community for this non-profit clinic. It was humbling to see dental professionals rally together with a common goal, which was to provide optimal oral health to those who have limited access. Perhaps, what amazed us the most was seeing past VCDH graduates continuing to volunteer at this clinic. Their dedication demonstrated how this clinic had positively impacted them, as oral healthcare professionals. Observing how this clinic was utilized by the community strongly indicated the importance and the need of this type of service in our area. Moreover, many of the community placements where we volunteered made us recognize how many people were unaware of the important link between oral and systemic health. As a result, many of us plan on remaining in touch with our communities and sharing our knowledge about oral health after the completion of this program. Therefore, as current students and soon to be future graduates, we can be advocates for these oral health needs by continuing to assist in any way we can.



VCDH students present their table clinic

Administrator and Change Agent

Being a multicultural community, we are aware that new immigrants from various countries may not have access to dental care or information regarding dental hygiene treatments, due to language or cultural barriers. One of many, goals of integrating communities as a whole is to be able to bring oral health awareness to lower socioeconomic and foreign national individuals. As, each culture has distinct values, we welcome diversity into Canada, but still need to provide accurate information about the best possible oral healthcare. The ESL population is faced with barriers to dental care, the prominent barrier being language. This is where our community placements and our dental hygiene education at VCDH facilitated the opportunity to decrease this barrier. Education about oral health was provided to the ESL learning centers across the lower mainland. In this environment we had many responsibilities, such as teaching ESL students how important it was to maintain good oral hygiene, learn about their cultural values and merge these values towards preventive oral self care. This furthered their interest into wanting to know how to select the correct type of toothbrush for their needs, effective brushing and flossing techniques and proper nutrition on how to maintain a healthy mouth.

We also had the opportunity to participate in a charity event called "Operation Christmas Child" (6). This charity event focused on communities outside of the Lower Mainland. We worked together during the Christmas season to compile 24 boxes of assorted Christmas gifts, games, and hygiene items to send to these children who were living in poverty-stricken environments throughout the world. Through participating in this activity, we were able to provide children in need with adequate supplies which would take care of their oral health and overall health needs. We collaborated as a class and worked together as a team towards our common goal.



Opportunely, we were able to also involve our dental hygiene instructors, and VCDH staff members in this project. Staff and faculty at VCDH donated funds which covered the transportation cost of all the Christmas boxes. Our goal was attained, as we successfully provided these children with a very Merry Christmas!

In conclusion, our dental hygiene class strongly feels that the education at VCDH, which has included diverse community placements, didactic courses, and clinical experiences have enabled us to attain an entry-to practice 'piece,' of all the spectrums within the dental hygiene scope of practice. We have gained the knowledge to become effective administrators and change agents within our communities. We have learned how to be advocates and are able to promote awareness of oral health. This passion will be carried throughout our careers as dental hygienists. We are very excited to embrace and knowingly will fulfill the dental hygiene meta-paradigm: "Oral health promotion and the prevention of oral diseases". (5)



TIPS!!!! FOR FUTURE DENTAL HYGIENIST

- A** Adventure: take on new opportunities
- D** Diversity: be sensitive to culture, beliefs and values
- P** Professionalism: be the best you can be
- I** Investigate: Intraoral exams save lives
- E** Ergonomics: straight spine will keep you fine

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E2F2 Class poses for a picture at Operation Christmas Child

www.vancouver-college-dental.org