Health & Medicine

Dentists Join Fight Against Diabetes

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Columbia dentists are trained to care for patients' overall health. (Courtesy of the College of Dental Medicine)

Researchers at the College of Dental Medicine have found that dentists can play a significant role in fighting a major public-health crisis.

In a study of 535 patients treated at the college’s dental clinic in northern Manhattan, Columbia dentists correctly identified 73 percent of those 182 patients who had diabetes or pre-diabetes, simply by looking for multiple missing teeth and gaps between their teeth and gums. With the addition of a finger-stick hemoglobin test, their accuracy increased to 92 percent. None of the patients had previously been told they had diabetes.

“Periodontal disease is an early complication of diabetes, and about 70 percent of U.S. adults see a dentist at least once a year,” says Ira Lamster, dean of the College of Dental Medicine and the senior author of the paper. “Prior research focused on identification strategies in medical settings — oral health-care settings had not been evaluated before. Our findings provide a simple approach that can be easily used in all dental-care settings.”

The study was published in the *Journal of Dental Research*. Other Columbia authors include Evanthia Lalla, Carol Kunzel, Sandra Burkett, and Bin Cheng.



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