

Burning Symptoms as the Initial Finding in Patients with Head and Neck Cancers-A Case Series and Literature Review

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Although it is widely accepted that oral cancers have silent growth from the patients perspective and are known to be symptomless, we came across few patients in whom some time before cancer was detected, unilateral burning symptoms were present. Here we present three cases of patients who initially came with burning symptoms and subsequently finding of oral cancer was established. However, Cuffari, *et al.* [1] analysed charts of 1412 patients with oral cancer and found that pain was the initial complaint in 19.2% of the sample. Twelve different types of pain were noticed: sore throat (37.6%), tongue pain (14.0%), mouth pain (12.9%); pain when swallowing (11.1%), dental pain (5.9%); earache (5.9%); pain in the palate (4.1%); burning mouth (3.3%); gingival pain (2.2%); pain when chewing (1.1%); neck pain (1.1%), and facial pain (0.7%). Furthermore, pain was associated with advanced TNM staging and location of tumor in the tongue and the tongue/mouth floor. In the year 1979, Wambach [2] described the case of the patient who suffered from burning tongue in whom small-cell bronchial carcinoma was afterwards diagnosed. This is the only case of burning symptoms in the oral cavity as a result of cancer in other parts of the body. It is known that burning, radiating and shooting pain is considered neuropathic and that prevalence of neuropathic cancer pain in other cancers is

found to be 11.8% [3]. Papadopoulou, *et al.* [4] described a 72 year old women whose chief disturbance was burning tongue and soreness of the lips. Subsequently, ulcerated mass on the edentulous left maxillary ridge was noticed and diagnosis of adenoid squamous cell carcinoma was obtained. Pellegrino [5] reported a case of adenoid cystic carcinoma with manifestation as a burning mouth syndrome. The same author [5] concluded that this was due to the irritation along lingual nerve. Gueiros, *et al.* [6] described two cases of focal burning sensation in the lateral border of the tongue diagnosed as subgemmal neurogenous plaque through biopsy. Mashberg, *et al.* [7] analysed symptoms of 102 patients with head and neck cancer and reported that tumefaction, burning, and pain were the most frequently

Therefore, it is very important especially in men to suspect head and neck malignancy if unilateral burning symptoms persist.

Patient 1: Year before diagnosis of planocellular cancer (PCC) of the right side of the lingual tonsils, he came with unilateral burning symptoms in the throat. He is non-smoker and drinks occasionally, however, cancer was HPV positive.

Patient 2: At the presentation he had mild erythematous patch on the right side of the tongue together with burning symptoms in that area, biopsy was taken and diagnosis of PCC was obtained.

Patient 3: Unilateral burning symptoms on the right alveolar ridge, reddish lesion on the alveolar mucosa, biopsy was taken and diagnosis of PCC was established.

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