

# How Dry Is Your Mouth??

Submitted by: **K. Wyshynski RN, CNPC (C)**  
**Rockyview Hospital**

I'm sure most of you can remember during your nursing education how we sometimes easily convinced ourselves that we were experiencing several, if not all of the disease processes and symptoms we were learning about...

Xerostomia is the medical term for the subjective complaint of dry mouth due to lack of saliva. It is a complaint that a lot of us really do have while working long hours in the dry atmosphere of the hospital. Dry mouth is also one of the most common complaints after radiation therapy of head and neck cancer patients.

Localized head and neck cancers, once diagnosed are treated with surgery, radiation and possibly chemotherapy. Unfortunately, radiation therapy can cause irreparable damage to the salivary glands increasing risks for severe and long term disorders such as problems with speech, chewing, talking and swallowing which often leads to loss of appetite, decreased body weight and tooth decay. Head and neck cancer survivors can suffer this permanent adverse effect of radiation therapy, substantially affecting their quality of life.

Dr. Hadi Seiklay of the University of Alberta, Division of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery along with Dr. Naresh Jha, Division of Radiation Oncology pioneered the 'Submandibular Salivary Gland Transfer Procedure' which is also known as the 'Seiklay and Jha Procedure.' In this procedure, a single salivary gland is moved from under the jaw to under the chin during the primary surgery for tumor removal. The extra surgical time that this takes is approximately 40 minutes, valuably proving to increase the quality of life in these patients by keeping a salivary gland functional. Under the chin, the salivary gland is more easily shielded from radiation during treatment. This potentially preserves and maintains the salivary function, preventing radiation induced Xerostomia.

Dr. Hadi Seiklay spoke of this procedure at the 7th Annual General Surgery Symposium on October 20, 2009 in Edmonton, Alberta. He quoted survival outcomes, one being that: "Patients 24 months post radiation without this procedure had no saliva production and patients having had the procedure were producing saliva, greatly improving their quality of life."

The remainder of Dr. Seiklay's head and neck cancer surgery presentation was very impressive, truly an affirmation to his practice dedicated to head, neck and skull based reconstruction in oncology.