

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Move AHEAD for Early Detection and Diagnosis of Pre- and Malignant Oral Lesions

Alexandria, VA, USA – A symposium exploring the latest developments in pre-clinical and clinical oral cancer detection was presented at the 104th General Session of the IADR, which was held in conjunction with the 55th Annual Meeting of the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research and the 50th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association for Dental Research on March 25-28, 2026 in San Diego, CA, USA.

To address the knowledge gap of limited prognostic value of current diagnostic methods amid rising incidence of oral cavity and pharynx cancer among both males and females, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research partnered with the National Cancer Institute's Early Detection Research Network (EDRN) to launch the national network for Advancing Head and Neck Cancer Early Detection Research (AHEAD). The purpose of AHEAD is to employ cutting-edge molecular, cellular, and multiomics approaches for the identification of high-risk oral potentially malignant disorders (OPMD) and early detection of both human papillomavirus (HPV)-negative oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) and HPV- positive oropharyngeal cancers. OPMD are one of the most common pre-cancerous conditions, with 284 million people requiring long-term follow-ups for OSCC screens globally.

In a recent American Dental Association position statement, the panel assessed the quality level of the published literature for the diagnosis of OPMD, and did not recommend cytologic adjuncts, autofluorescence, tissue reflectance, or vital staining adjuncts to evaluate OPMD. Additionally, WHO histologic grading of OPMD has limited prognostic value in assessing the transformation risks, plagued by low inter-observer and intra-observer consistency.

This symposium assembled a panel of thought leaders to discuss the current and future research directions to detect high-risk oral lesions at the earliest time and reduce the oral cancer burden globally. The audience learned about the latest research and technologies in preclinical and clinical detection of these oral cancers, and was introduced to the AHEAD/EDRN network for collaborative opportunities.

Organized by Jason Wan, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, Bethesda, MD, USA; Yu Lei, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA; and Simon Young, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, USA, the symposium, "Move AHEAD for Early Detection and Diagnosis of Pre- and Malignant Oral Lesions" took place on Wednesday, March 25 at 3:15 p.m. PDT (UTC-7).

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About IADR/AADOCR

The International Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (IADR) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to drive dental, oral, and craniofacial research for health and well-being worldwide. IADR represents the individual scientists, clinician-scientists, dental professionals, and students based in academic, government, non-profit, and private-sector institutions who share our mission. The American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOCR) is the largest division of IADR. Learn more at www.iadr.org.