Oral cancer is one of the most deadly forms of cancer when not detected early. An estimated one-half of all patients diagnosed in the late stages of oral cancer die within 5 years of diagnosis. Many factors have been identified that contribute to oral cancer – smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and, most recently, HPV (Human Papillomavirus) are among the biggest causes of oral cancer. Alarming research shows that the fastest growing segment of the population diagnosed with oral cancer are non-smokers who are under 50 years of age.

While relatively hard to detect, recent technological advances have made it increasingly easier to screen and diagnose oral cancer. Dentists have been on the front line of oral cancer detection and have the skills to make diagnoses. With new tools to help in the detection and subsequent treatment of oral cancer through the use of oral cancer screenings and brush biopsy, oral cancer can be identified early, increasing survival rates to 80 or 90%.

**What is an oral cancer screening?**
Oral cancer screenings are typically a routine part of a regular dental check up. Dentists examine the entire mouth, including the tongue and cheek areas. Some dentists (where allowable by law) may even palpate the patient's neck area looking for lumps and soreness. The purpose of the visual inspection of the oral cavity is to look for small red or white spots or sores that may be suspicious for disease. If a spot appears to be suspicious, a simple technique to biopsy the lesion may prove beneficial and provide a preliminary diagnosis.

**What is a brush biopsy?**
A brush biopsy is a small brush that is used to scrape samples of a suspicious spot or sore from the patient's mouth. The sample of cells is then sent to a lab for analysis. In a study of 945 patients who had a brush biopsy performed, the Oral Cancer Foundation found that biopsy detected all cases of oral cancer correctly.

The oral brush biopsy can be done in the dental office without having to make a special appointment. The procedure is relatively painless and typically does not require topical or local anesthetics. The dentist simply rotates the small brush a few times in the suspicious area and sends the sample to a lab for analysis.

Introduced to the general dentistry audience in 2000, the brush biopsy procedure can be compared to the Pap smear for women. Both are diagnostic screening tests that are easy to administer and are used to identify diseases at an early and curable stage in the office setting. The benefit of a brush biopsy is that it can be performed during a routine examination, but is only done for those who exhibit visible sores or suspicious spots in their mouths.

**Benefit advantages**
Brush Biopsy is an option for coverage in your group plan. Including this service may increase your initial benefits coverage costs; however, the long-term benefits of early detection of oral cancer cannot be overlooked. The health impact of early detection (80 to 90% survival rate) is obvious. Along with patient quality of life, there is also an obvious advantage to controlling the medical costs associated with treating oral cancer in its early stages.

**Benefits of the future**
Oral cancer screenings are a large part of routine preventive dental care, but they are only the beginning basis to early detection of the disease. Adding brush biopsy coverage to your plan can enhance and improve the oral health of your employees, not to mention general body health. As you consider adding brush biopsy to your benefits coverage, rest assured that Delta Dental of Virginia can support your decision through our flexible DCS2000® claims system that allows for customized coverage options. Furthermore, you have the support of our dedicated customer service team that can answer your employees’ questions quickly and thoroughly. It’s your choice and we want you to know that we can accommodate whatever decision is best for your organization.

To learn more about adding brush biopsy to your group benefits plan, including specific costs associated with adding this coverage, please contact your Delta Dental of Virginia account executive.

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**Oral Cancer Statistics**
- ▲ 35,000 in US will be newly diagnosed in 2008
- ▲ 11% increase in diagnosis in 2007 alone
- ▲ 80-90% survival rate when detected early
- ▲ 50% survival rate after 5 years when detected in late stages
- ▲ Smoking, excessive alcohol and HPV are the 3 most common causes

**Symptoms of Oral Cancer**
- ▲ A sore in the mouth that doesn’t heal within 2 weeks
- ▲ A lump in the cheek
- ▲ A white or red area/sore on any area of the mouth
- ▲ A sore throat or feeling that something is caught in the throat
- ▲ Difficulty chewing or swallowing, or moving the jaw or tongue
- ▲ Numbness of the tongue or other parts of the mouth
- ▲ Swelling of the jaw

*Oral Cancer Foundation*