

DENTISTRY

# Pulling Wisdom Teeth Urged As Aid in Preventing Cancer

## Dental Meeting Also Discusses Methods For Saving Teeth, Prevention of Pyorrhea, Surgery for Abscess

**E**XTRACTION of wisdom teeth as an aid in preventing cancer was urged by Dr. Douglas Quick of Cancer Memorial Hospital at the Greater New York Dental Meeting.

The area back of the wisdom tooth, technically known as the third molar, is one of the most frequent cancer sites in the mouth, Dr. Quick said. The position of the tooth makes it difficult to clean and the patch of mucous membrane just back of it is likely to become swollen and inflamed and the constant irritation may lead to cancer.

When there is any question in the dentist's mind about removing this tooth, Dr. Quick believes the decision should be for removal.

By watching for other conditions that can lead to cancer, such as jagged teeth and badly fitting plates, or false teeth, the dentist can do much to help prevent cancer, Dr. Quick pointed out. One outstanding tooth where the teeth next to it are missing can also be a source of irritation that may lead to cancer. Plates must be changed as the shape of the mouth and jaws changes with advancing years in order to avoid irritation. Pyorrhea and chronic infections in the mouth and especially around the gums add to the cancer hazard.

Some persons are much more susceptible to the irritation of tobacco smoke than others, Dr. Quick said. A distinction should be made between the danger of smoking and the danger of excessive smoking. It is the latter particularly which increases the cancer hazard.

### Could Save Half

More than half the teeth extracted after the age of 50 years, and nearly half of those pulled before 50, could be saved, Dr. Grace Rogers Spalding of Birmingham, Mich., told fellow dentists. The saving of teeth could be accomplished, she indicated, by paying attention to diseases of the gums and structures that support the teeth.

Among the causes of these diseases Dr. Spalding listed inherited factors; defects of nutrition; outside chemical

elements; physical force and energies; parasites (germs); social and psychological influences.

The inherited factors may cause abnormal arrangement, shape and formation of the teeth. These cannot be prevented, perhaps, but they can and should be corrected promptly, Dr. Spalding pointed out. She advised massage of the gums by the patient to stimulate faulty circulation of blood such as is commonly found in these diseases.

Eating is also important in preventing the diseases that lead to loss of teeth. The teeth must be used to be healthy, and too soft foods do not give them enough use. Eating too much, too little, too fast or failing to eat a balanced diet are other possible causes of gum diseases which Dr. Spalding suggested the dentist should investigate and correct in each patient.

### Should Go to Bed

Having a tooth pulled may seem a minor matter to people who pride themselves on their ruggedness. In case of difficult extractions, however, even these rugged individuals should be ordered to bed, Dr. Thomas Connor of Atlanta, Ga., said.

Dr. Connor did not refer specifically to President Roosevelt but some of his remarks were said to throw light on the difficulties which the President has been through recently with his infected tooth.

There is always some infection after these difficult extractions and shock "is more or less extensive," Dr. Connor said. He believes such patients need rest in bed in order to recuperate properly and to avoid a spread of the infection or other difficulties. He also advised that the dentist see them 24 or 48 hours after the extraction because at this time first evidence of undue infection can be detected.

Nervous patients are likely to go to bed after a tooth extraction without being told, but the patient who prides himself on being able to stand pain and who claims he cannot miss a day or two from business should be ordered to bed in

spite of his protests, to avoid further complications.

### Operations for Abscesses

Instead of pulling teeth in cases of abscesses, dentists were advised to operate and treat infected areas. A high degree of success with this method, with saving of the involved teeth, was reported by Dr. Ralph F. Sommer of the University of Michigan.

Complete regrowth of bone after the operation takes place in about ten months in areas of ordinary size, Dr. Sommer reported. It may be possible in future, he said, to hasten the regrowth or regeneration by bone powder implants, but at present this procedure is still in the experimental stage.

"The dental need of the people of this country is beyond comprehension," Dr. Sommer said in commenting on thousands of full mouth X-rays he has made annually during the last fifteen years on patients of all walks of life and from nearly every state of the Union.

### Pyorrhea Prevented

Pyorrhea can be prevented by keeping the teeth in position so that the bite is normal, Dr. J. A. Loughry of Cleveland said. He added that dentists would come to be looked on as "real benefactors and not (*Turn to Page 398*)



### OLDEST INHABITANT

*Easily eligible for charter membership in an Association of Oldest Inhabitants is the long-departed jellyfish that left this imprint in beach sand that later hardened into a slab of rock in the Grand Canyon of Arizona.*