Patients opt for wisdom tooth removal to improve quality of life

[Rosemont, IL, June 1, 2014] Lower wisdom teeth, whether partially or fully erupted, often have a chronic inflammatory condition called pericoronitis. Symptoms of this condition, which commonly occur between 16 and 30 years of age, range from mild (pain and swelling) to severe (enlarged lymph glands, fever, difficulty swallowing, and limited mouth-opening).

“Effect of Quality-of-Life Measures on the Decision to Remove Third Molars in Subjects with Mild Pericoronitis Symptoms,” appears in the July issue of the Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. The investigators from the University of North Carolina considered which factors, in addition to pain, influence the decision of a patient with pericoronitis to have these teeth removed. The study focuses on patient circumstances, the availability of dental insurance and quality-of-life measures as factors that may explain a patient’s decision to have their wisdom teeth removed.

Patients were enrolled in the study during a 6-year period from 2006 to 2012. Of these, 70% elected removal of the affected teeth within 6 months of entering the study. Of those who initially chose to not have extraction, 41% eventually underwent removal of the affected teeth.

Most of the patients who opted for removal were well-educated Caucasian females, and fewer than half (41%) had dental insurance. The odds of electing early surgery were three times greater for those whose lifestyle was compromised with at least “a little trouble” in opening their mouths compared to those who reported no such problems.

The authors concluded that patients with quality-of-life problems from their wisdom teeth (mild symptoms of pericoronitis), factors not often considered serious by clinicians were commonly associated with the patient’s decision for early removal of the affected teeth.

Read the complete study findings at J Oral Maxillofac Surg. 72: 1235-1243, 2014

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