

INFORMATION SHEET – KERATOCYSTS

Odontogenic keratocysts are jaw cysts, which form from the tissue which makes up the follicle of teeth. They are not cancer, but **benign lesions**, yet they are the most aggressive and recurrent of all jaw cysts. If not treated completely these tumors may enlarge and reoccur. Many times the tumors “hollow out” the jaw and may cause jaw fractures. They can also be associated with other medical (systemic) conditions.

Location: Most occur in the lower jaw and many times, they are associated with impacted teeth. They are slow-growing, rarely painful, and may cause expansion of the jaw and an apparent facial enlargement.

On X-ray: Keratocysts appear as gray lesions with a white border. They are seen as unicystic (one cyst) or multilocular (many cysts). Sometimes, multiple keratocysts may be present in different parts of the jaw.

Treatment: Keratocysts which are central in the jaws are either usually multilocular. These cysts lesions may usually be treated by aggressive removal of the tumor (enucleation) and removing the margin of the peripheral bone (curettage). The risk of jaw fracture is always present and healing can be unpredictable. We, therefore, prefer to bone graft these lesions during the initial procedure. Teeth that are present within the cyst may either need to be removed or root canal treatment performed on them at a later date.

Staging: Treatment of keratocysts is performed in several stages:

- 1) Biopsy: This is done to firmly diagnose the lesion. These lesions may also be other jaw tumors.
- 2) Cyst removal and Reconstruction: This is done in the hospital or the office and may require a bone plate to be applied. These are usually performed using incisions in the mouth. Incisions on the face may be necessary to help with surgical access. Bone grafts (from the hip or ceramic bone) are used to rebuild the bone.

Insurance Coverage: Most of the procedures, including all hospitalizations are covered by medical insurance. Intraoral biopsies and tooth removal is covered by dental insurance. Typically most insurance companies **do not** cover dental implant surgery if necessary to replace lost teeth. They may cover the dental procedures necessary to fabricate new teeth.

Notes: Many oral and maxillofacial surgeons will not treat these lesions due to their complexity and due to the necessity of having an assistant surgeon and the long follow-up time involved. Plastic Surgeons and Ear Nose and Throat surgeons have little or no experience with treating these lesions or the dental implant reconstruction.