Pain in the Jaw

OP Kapoo

I saw a rare case in my clinic. He had developed pain in the jaw for a few weeks/months before an abscess appeared. After it was incised, the biopsy revealed Cysticercosis! I am sure I will never see such a case in my life again!

What are the common causes of pain in the Jaw?

Usually the patient sees the dentist first. When not satisfied, he now comes to a GP. The following can be the causes. Most of them can be diagnosed by taking a good history which every GP can do.

1. If (a) the pain in the jaw appears after an exertion, (b) it subsides as soon as the patient takes rest (c) The patient is middle-aged or elderly with few known risk factors of IHD. Diagnose angina pectoris and get a stress test done to confirm with ECG changes after exercise.

2. If the patient is an elderly individual and has been having aches, feverishness and has an undiagnosed illness and now gets pain in the jaw after eating a meal and talking, it is due to temporal arteritis.

3. If a middle aged or elderly patient develops acute pain in the jaw on one side and he does not allow you to touch even the skin of that area, watch out for a rash of herpes zoster within 2-3 days.

4. If the patient is elderly and a known case of depression and he complains of an ache (not pain) over the jaw during day and night, the diagnosis is “atypical facial pain”.

5. If the patient complains of severe electric like pain of the jaw on one side which is precipitated by washing the face or shaving, etc., and this pain has lasted for a number of days or weeks, then it is Trigeminal Neuralgia.

6. If the pain in the jaw is localised and comes after chewing, especially hard food, then it is dental pain.

7. If there is severe pain of long duration, specially at night, interfering with sleep and all other reports are normal, get a CT scan done to exclude malignancy.

8. If the pain is mainly over temporomandibular joint and there is crepitus over the joint while chewing, diagnose arthritis of temporomandibular joint.

9. If the patient goes on complaining of aches behind the temporomandibular joint and all the investigations are normal, get X-rays of upper cervical spine done because this rare site of cervical spondylosis of C2-C3 area does not produce pain in the neck but pain at the above site.

10. Finally, if somebody in the family or neighbourhood had Mumps with a history of fever and one-sided pain over the jaw, look out for the swelling of parotid gland. Suppurative parotitis is rare but more common in immunocompromised persons.