Survival rates for oral cancer are very poor, at approximately 50% overall, and have not improved markedly in recent decades despite advances in therapeutic interventions. Detecting oral cancer at an early stage is believed to be the most effective means of reducing rates of death, morbidity and disfigurement from this disease. Tobacco and alcohol consumption and pre-malign lesions are the most common aetiological factors. The proportion of patients presenting with oral cancer at an advanced stage is troubling. Early diagnosis is the most effective way of reducing the individual burden of the disease, decreasing morbidity and mortality and improving quality of life. For early diagnosis, healthcare providers should perform oral cancer examinations as part of their patient care regime, and need to be knowledgeable about early signs of oral carcinoma. Oral cancer awareness among the public should also be improved.