

**KENDRA GRIM, MD:** In our study, we're studying dental extraction-- do the extraction before heart surgery. We found that actually the risk of having a complication from that-- a serious complication-- was higher than expected.

So we consider pulling teeth before heart surgery, especially for patients that are going to have a new valve placed, because the new valve may be vulnerable to bacteria in the bloodstream actually attaching to it and causing a serious infection. And we know that patients that have dental problems may be at higher risk for having more bacteria in the bloodstream and therefore may have higher risk of having an infection on that new heart valve. Infections on artificial heart valves is actually quite serious.

What we found in our study is that their risk for having the teeth pulled may be higher than what we thought. So it does put our specialists in a difficult situation on whether or not to ask these patients to have their teeth pulled before heart surgery.

So our take-home message for the situation was that discussion between the specialists-- between the cardiologist, the cardiac surgeon, the oral surgeon, as well as anesthesia-- would be in the best interest of the patient to try to ascertain what particular risk is for this individual patient. And so if the risk we think of taking the teeth out is low but then the benefit is perceived to be high, then, of course, we would proceed with the tooth extraction. But if we think the risk of having the teeth extracted before surgery is too high, then we may consider not proceeding with the tooth extraction.

We really felt compelled to do this research to try to help patients understand better what their risk may be going into dental surgery before heart surgery. And we're excited of the discussion this may provoke within the medical community.