Oral Health — A Focus on Prevention —

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Dr. Tin Chun Wong delivered a keynote lecture at the Joint 12th AAPD and 65th JSOH conference. She opened with a discussion of the work of the World Dental Federation (FDI) and how it collaborates with the WHO. She spoke of the FDI’s Vision 2020 strategy and the importance of World Oral Health Day. Dr. Wong emphasized the gravity of non-communicable diseases before moving on to the topic of inter-professional collaborative practice and inter-professional education. She talked briefly about the available evidence as related to quality of life, before ending with key messages. This article summarizes her keynote lecture and presentation.

Introduction

The theme of this 12th meeting of the AAPD and 65th meeting of the JSOH, “The Better Oral Health, The Happier Daily Life” captures the importance of prevention and the sentiment of specialists in preventive dentistry. Today, due to advances in science, improved living conditions and a variety of other factors, people are living longer. This is becoming a key subject of debate within governments, media and members of the general public. Longevity is one of humankind’s greatest desires. We all try our best to live as long as we can. In health policy thinking this can be seen as a burden, due to the cost it imposes on society. Congresses such as this one can reverse such negative thinking by clearly demonstrating that investing in health, throughout the life course, can reduce the cost of health provision and enable our population, young or old, to live full, happy lives.

The FDI

The FDI is a non-governmental organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. It has 200 National Dental Associations (NDAs) and specialist group members. It is present in some 150 countries and is the official representative body for over one million dentists worldwide.

Its vision is “Leading the World to Optimal Oral Health”. This substantial task is widening as the FDI expands its role into promotion of oral health linked to the promotion of general health.

What the FDI does

- Advises multilateral agencies on oral health policy.
- Carries out oral health advocacy at international level.
- Explores and debates emerging worldwide trends in oral health and dentistry.
- Supports NDAs and builds capacity.
- Undertakes oral health promotion and disease prevention through oral health literacy.
- Promotes and undertakes continuing education.

Over the years, the FDI has developed initiatives, campaigns, policies and congresses, with a view to occupying a space that no other charity group or not-for-profit group can claim.

The FDI works in close collaboration in a bilateral relationship with the WHO in order to deliver policy related to oral and general health.

The World Health Organization

In December 2013 the WHO published a report entitled “Multi-sectoral action for a life course approach to healthy ageing.” This document outlines the facts and expected trends pertaining to health and aging. The report details the challenges to health systems, to the work force, to social systems and to gender politics, and points out gaps in our knowledge and in general leadership. Also of concern are the changing disease patterns. For example, type 2 diabetes and obesity, which in the past, mainly afflicted the middle-aged or elderly population, is now seen in increasingly younger populations, and occasionally in very young children.

The WHO’s report suggests that actions are needed to respond to these challenges and outlines recommendations for achieving these responses. These recommendations define the best steps that countries, at different levels of development, can take to build and integrate a continuum of care throughout the life course. They prof-
fer means of identifying evidence-based strategies to create such environments. The report recommends development of models and standards for monitoring and quantifying the health of populations, elaborate strategies for capacity building, workforce development to address the health needs of the populations and to identify sustainable financing models, to ensure access to services.

On the topic of Prevention for Health, Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the WHO, declared in 2012 that: “The dental profession is a highly respected member of the public health family. After all, dentistry pioneered the concept of preventive medicine, turning it into an art as well as a science. A profession that makes prevention a driving incentive deserves our highest regard.”

**World Health Day**

The WHO focuses on international advocacy as a prime means of ensuring that the centrality of health is understood and that the opportunities arising from it are fully appreciated. It highlights the annual World Health Day to get the message across, with each year having an associated theme. The theme for the year 2012 is particularly noteworthy: “Good Health adds Life to Years.” This was emphasized with promotional posters which showed, for example: a lady of 70, salsa-dancing with her grandson in Cuba; a 92-year-old gentleman sky diving in Germany; a shepherdess at the age of 67, herding her goats and sheep in the mountains of the Andes in Peru; and in China, a gentleman ascending steps unaided, at over the age of 95. This type of promotional campaign is invaluable to deliver the core message and communicate the meaning of a healthier and happier life.

**FDI Vision 2020**

In response to the WHO, the FDI gathered a group of experts to establish a strategic plan for dentistry, resulting in Vision 2020. Vision 2020 highlights two fundamental principles for the profession: that oral health is a fundamental right for every member of the population; and that oral health must be included in all policies. The FDI endeavors to encourage governments to consider oral health in areas such as town planning, education, engineering and budget making.

Vision 2020 focuses on 5 key areas:

- Meeting the increasing need and demand for oral health care.
- Expanding the role of oral health care professionals.
- Shaping a responsive educational model.
- Mitigating the impacts of socio-economic dynamics.
- Fostering fundamental and translational research and technology.

**World Oral Health Day**

In order to carry its work further, the FDI has held a World Oral Health Day (WOHD) for a number of years. Recently these have been themed to increase the health-promotional impact. For example, in 2014 the theme focused around smiling, laughing and happiness. In 2015, the slogan was “Smile for Life.” This year the slogan was “Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body.”

**Non-Communicable Diseases**

It is becoming increasingly clear and accepted that groups of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, respiratory diseases and oral diseases share common risks such as tobacco use, an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and immodest use of alcohol. Subsequent to the United Nations Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (2011), the FDI acknowledges the common risk factor approach and has collaborated with other members of the World Health Professional Alliance (WHPA) to publish the Health Promotion Card, a tool for members of populations and health care professionals to address common risk factors for non-communicable diseases.

The FDI also supports the development a mobile application (app) by the WHPA for use on smartphones. Already in widespread use are apps that utilize, for example, the pedometer functionality of smartphones to measure physical exercise, or the microphone to assess how the user is sleeping. The FDI is keen to utilize this technology to help populations track general health from a common risk-factor approach, and thereby prevent NCDs.

**Inter-professional Collaborative Practice & Inter-professional Education**

The WHO’s urgent announcement on type 2 diabetes made on 6 April 2016 exemplifies the need for inter-professional collaborative practice between dental professionals, physicians and other health care workers. The statement highlighted the fact that there has been a four-fold increase in type 2 diabetes worldwide in the last 25
years, with a total of 422 million people now affected.

The rise in prevalence of NCDs along with increasing complexity of health issues, a worldwide shortage of health workers and fragmented health systems call for an integrated approach to health care - Collaborative Practice. The FDI supports expanding dialogue on intra- and inter-professional collaborative practice and inter-professional education, facilitating the policy and advocacy work undertaken by National Dental Associations (NDAs) for the planning of the future oral health workforce and enhancing the ability of the dental profession to lead change, rather than have solutions imposed upon them. Dentists work with a number of other health care professionals and so are in a position to provide encouragement and incentives, and be leaders in a preventive program.

Evidence and Quality of Life

In September 2015, in Bangkok, the FDI presented a policy statement on oral health-related quality of life (OHRQoL), which was subsequently adopted by the general assembly. It emphasizes that:

“Oral Health is related to general health and quality of life”

“Dental caries may cause impaired chewing, decreased appetite, sleep problems, and poor school and work performance.”

“Measures such as the ‘oral health-related quality of life’ (OHRQoL), have been developed to measure the extent to which oral conditions affect individuals' behaviour and social functioning, and complement the conventional clinical assessments of oral health.”

The FDI recommends/recognizes that:

- OHRQoL should be incorporated into assessments of oral healthcare needs of populations for a comprehensive approach to planning oral health services.
- All national oral health surveys should include a validated OHRQoL measure.
- OHRQoL measures should be used to determine the cost-effectiveness of treatments and public health interventions.
- OHRQoL measures are essential in advocacy for oral health policy.
- NDAs play an important role in advocating for all these recommendations.

An invaluable resource with regard to this, and other areas in public health, has been produced by Dr. Kakuhiro Fukai and in the form of a compendium of the review of literature regarding oral health as related to general health for achieving healthy longevity in an ageing society by the Japan Dental Association.

Key Messages and Conclusion

In order to promote lifelong oral health as a part of general health and thereby promotion of quality of life, oral health literacy must be improved. Preventive, rather than restorative, approaches to oral health care should be adopted. Low cost procedures such as minimal intervention dentistry should be considered in order to increase access to dentistry. Oral health and other health professionals must pursue, develop and strengthen cross-discipline collaboration. Policymakers must develop innovative strategies to ensure a ‘health-in-all-policies’ and ‘oral-health-in-all-policies’ approach to policy making and to develop oral health plans, in the light of population ageing.

The next FDI world dental congress will be held in September 2016 in Poland. There is a call to respond to the WHO’s strategies, and the work to achieve improved oral health, general health and healthy aging will continue.