

## Health through Oral Health: Role of a Dentist

Asaad Javaid Mirza<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Department of Operative Dentistry, Baqai Medical University, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Director, Institute of Post Graduate Dental Studies, Baqai Medical University, Pakista

Poor oral health and hygiene leads to dental caries and periodontal diseases. The researchers have established a strong link between waning oral health and underlying cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and premature births. According to WHO, the burden of oral disease in developed nations is very high and in unprivileged populations it is even higher. Findings of various studies reveal that 60-90% school going children have dental caries and 15-20% adults of 35-44 years of age suffer from severe periodontal ailments.

In the years to come, more emphasis therefore is required on health promotion education and preventive approaches in combination with surgical or restorative treatment of the damage done by dental and periodontal diseases. It is now, a proven fact that good oral hygiene is highly mandatory to keep one's body free of systemic diseases. A dentist and his team undoubtedly play a significant role in minimizing the oral disease burden and improve the oral health of a population. For effective preventive oral care, the dentists warn their patients about cariogenic diet and injurious drinking habits. Oral hygienists can improve their oral health by professional cleaning and polishing of teeth and demonstrating them proper brushing technique.

Smoking cause injury to nearly each organ of the human body and tobacco associated diseases are ever-increasing, particularly in the third world countries. These countries are facing maximum rise in the rate of tobacco consumption and it has been anticipated that tobacco will be the principal cause of mortality in the world by the third decade of present century. The adverse effects of tobacco use on oral health are frightening which include mouth cancers, pre-cancerous lesions and increased severity of periodontal diseases. Dentists therefore can be significantly instrumental in smoking cessation drives as they have widespread and regular contact with millions of patients of variable ages and in varying states of health. It is very much in conformity with WHO goal of the oral health program which is "to ensure that oral health teams and oral health organizations are directly, appropriately and routinely involved in influencing patients and the public to avoid and discontinue the use of all forms of tobacco." FDI also fully supports this goal.

Regarding operative interventions, it has become extremely obligatory to universally follow principles of minimal intervention dentistry (MID). MID is a philosophy of professional care concerned with initial occurrence, timely detection, and earliest possible cure of disease followed by minimally invasive repair of irreversible hard tissue damage caused by dental disease. Minimally invasive treatment not only reduces the patients' anxiety but also conserves the natural tooth structure to the maximum. It provides benefit to the suffering patients by elimination and healing caries and not merely treating its symptoms. It is surprising that though MID principles have been approved by FDI in 2002 but evidence suggests that Black's philosophy of managing caries by drilling and filling is still being followed in most of the countries.

Despite availability of best treatment modalities and good self imposed oral health care initiatives, millions of people undergo loss of their natural teeth. For the last two decades, dental implants provide superior option for replacement of the inevitably lost teeth. Improvement in implant design, introduction of biomolecular surface modification for osseous integration, immediate loading and better sinus lifting techniques have given universal popularity to implants in dentistry. In future, dentists will be using them with more confidence, greater ease and higher success rate instead of using conventional methods for tooth replacement. The older options undermine the strength of the entire arch and lead to bone resorption in the jaw.

Oral health is an integral part of an individual's general health but very often general health promotion programs don't always include oral health and preventive dental education component despite its known significance. It is need of the hour that public health policy and decision-makers should make certain that dental issues are flawlessly taken into account and the dental professionals are consulted in all the matters relevant to general public health.

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