Malaysia takes on shortage of dentists

Malaysian National News Agency

PENANG, Malaysia: As a first step to establishing a National Oral Health Center, the Health Ministry of Malaysia has announced the formation of a Center of Excellence for dentistry in several hospitals nationwide. The center will be opened in stages later this year and cover various disciplines, such as mouth-cancer screenings and dental surgery, Health Minister Datuk Seri Luoe Tong Lai told reporters at the Malaysian Dental Association’s AGM held in George Town last week.

The Health Minister added that the center will be crucial for dental experts in his country to enhance their specialities in-line with current technological advancements. As oral health is becoming more complex, there is need for expertise and specialisation, he said. This year, the government has already given out 56 scholarships to students in selected fields of dentistry compared to 29 last year.

Malaysia is facing a shortage of dentists and needs to increase their numbers in order to cope with the increased demand for dental care. According to ministry figures, only 60 per cent of posts for dental officers in the Health Ministry were filled in 2008 and only 56 per cent of all dental specialist posts. The Health Minister said that his ministry aims to triple the number of dentists and increase the ratio of dentists to the population from slightly over 1:8,000 to 1:4,000 by the year 2017.

On 51 December 2008, there were 5,410 dentists in Malaysia, of which 241 were specialists. [1]

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann)
Micronesian study confirms oral health benefits of xylitol

Claudia Salwiczek

Recently, the use of a xylitol syrup rinse was confirmed to be effective protection against tooth decay. Researchers, who conducted a study in the Republic of the Marshall Islands where the caries rate is two to three times that of the typical American or European community, found that 16 ml of xylitol syrup could prevent up to 70 per cent of decayed teeth. The findings were presented in the July issue of the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, and demonstrate the first evidence (to the authors’ knowledge) that xylitol is “effective for the prevention of decay in primary teeth for toddlers.”

Scientists in Finland first discovered the beneficial uses of xylitol in dentistry in the early 1970s. Studies led by Profs. Kauko K. Mäkinen and Arje Schein at the Institute of Dentistry at the University of Turku proved that xylitol, which occurs as a sugar in the fibres of many fruits and vegetables, inhibits the adhesion of the caries-causing oral bacteria Streptococcus mutans.

Xylitol is widely used in a number of dental care products, including chewing gum, toothpaste and mouth rinses. It is also used in oral care products like chewing gum (DTI/Photo Yellowj).