Malnutrition and weak oral health trouble Aussie nursing homes

Australian Associated Press

RHODES, Australia: According to a study in the Australasian Journal of Ageing, malnutrition is rife in Australian nursing homes, affecting half of its residents. Nursing specialists are calling for an overhaul of the nutritional care of vulnerable elderly people after survey results indicated that only 9.9 per cent of elderly people in nursing homes are well nourished. The nutritional assessment of more than 550 high-care residents in eight aged care facilities in Queensland found 45 per cent moderately and 6.5 per cent severely malnourished.

Residents’ dental health, which is known to influence general health, was also found to be poorly recorded, with oral assessments of ten outdated. The situation will be the best improved with advanced staff training and a greater focus on dietary intake, the researchers suggest. “Most causes of malnutrition (in nursing homes) are modifiable and central to improving this is greater staff awareness, better assessment skills of care staff and adequate overall management of nutritional care,” they wrote.

The study also showed that older patients and those requiring the most care were the most malnourished. The research team, lead by Queensland University of Technology, also found that only 59 per cent of malnourished residents had been seen by a dietician, and only 29 per cent were receiving supplements.

These high percentages are probably due to responsibility for daily nutritional care, such as assistance with meals, supplements, and monitoring of food intake, falling largely onto care staff, with little intervention by management or external healthcare practitioners. The study also showed that staff awareness of the importance of nutrition on resident outcomes was inconsistent.

SALISBURY, UK: Twenty-four basic sets of dental equipment and portable chairs are helping newly qualified dental nurses set up mobile health clinics in Cambodia, the UK-based organisation Dentaid has announced. The nurses will be trained to provide extractions, scaling, anaesthetic, and simple traumatic Restorative Treatment (ART), which is ideal for taking into health centres in rural communities in the country who may not have electricity or running water. They can also identify conditions, such as oral cancer, and refer patients on for further treatment.

Dentaid has received funding of £14,400 (£US21,455) for this project from Dr Neel Silka of the Himalayan Dental Care in London. It is hoped that this will be the start of a long-standing relationship with the training school, as there will be nurses graduating each year who require equipment to take out into the community. Dentaid officials told Dental Tribune International that although comprehensive data are almost non-existent.

According to figures from the World Health Organisation, Cambodia had a total of 320 dental nurses in 2005.