“Patients’ satisfaction towards functional reconstruction is very high”

An interview with Dr Bo Chen, Beijing University School of Stomatology

With increasing public awareness of the benefits of dental implants, an increasing number of patients are considering this treatment option. While current studies often focus only on clinical aspects such as osseo-integration, patient responses to psychological and psychosocial changes are only infrequently addressed. Dental Tribune International Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann spoke with Dr Bo Chen from the Department of Oral Implantology (Beijing University School of Stomatology in China) about her latest study on patients’ attitudes following implant placement and subsequent restoration.

Dr Bo Chen: Severe jaw-bone defects due to tumour resection present a major problem for functional restoration (mastication, swallowing and speech), which severely influences patients’ quality of life. Reconstruction of lost tissue in order to facilitate implant placement often means relatively complex maxillofacial surgeries accompanied by certain morbidities. Unlike Europe or the US, where patients suffering from head or neck tumours are mostly treated by ENT surgeons and plastic surgeons, oral and maxillofacial surgeons in China treat such tumours in addition to conducting the subsequent bone reconstruction. The sample of such patients at the Peking University School of Stomatology is quite large compared with what is available in the literature.

Thus, I decided upon investigating patient satisfaction of this kind of treatment series.

In a nutshell, what was the outcome and what psychological and psychosocial changes following surgery did the patients report?

Oral defects and edentulism can have a significant impact on people’s lives. How do they generally affect the social status of people in China?

Oral defects and edentulism may lower body image significantly. People tend to limit their social activities and contact with their surroundings. They tend to be more depressed and frustrated, less tolerant of their family and environment. In extreme cases, some patients are so frustrated they commit suicide.

What conclusions did you draw from these results?

The patients’ satisfaction of functional reconstruction was very high. Their quality of life has greatly improved as demonstrated by the OHIP score. For financial reasons, only about 10 per cent of the patients are undergoing functional reconstruction with osseo-integrated implants despite the morbidity of the surgery. Their OHIP score was not significantly different to that of a healthy population, which means that they did not have more frequently reported psychological or psychosocial problems. For the majority who did not undergo functional reconstruction, the high cost of implant treatment was their most significant concern.

What measures did you use for the study and how did you implement them?

Questionnaires in the form of a visual analogue scale (VAS) of patients’ treatment satisfaction were used in addition to the OHIP-14 (Oral Health Impact Profile-14) in this retrospective study. Patients were invited to the clinic for these evaluations, which took 50 minutes on average. For those who could not come to the clinic, the evaluation was conducted by telephone.

Are dental implants already a standard treatment option for maxillofacial surgery in China, and if not why not?

Maxillofacial surgery is practised at a high standard at the Peking University School of Stomatology and is quite affordable for the patients. But dental implants are not yet a standard treatment option in China. Although the lack of public awareness and availability of competent clinicians may contribute to this, the high cost of this treatment option, which is usually not covered by insurance, may be the most significant factor.

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With the International Congress of Oral Implantologists “implantology week” and the FDI Annual World Dental Congress 2-5 September 2010 Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, to promote implantology in the Asia Pacific region, the Chinese Stomatological Association recently announced a partnership with the International Congress of Oral Implantologists to promote implantology in China.

There is definitely a need for more public awareness in the field. We are lagging far behind in this regard compared to Europe or the US.

Thank you very much for your interview.