Good oral health is not a luxury but a necessity of life

Bella Monse (left) and Habib Benzian on the eve of their promotion.

Dental Tribune Netherlands

Dental Tribune Netherlands to improve oral health in the Philippines. Although at first she was working to improve oral health only, she soon realised that this was not enough and that the general health of schoolchildren needed to be improved as well.

Monse (born in 1959, Innsbruck, Austria) worked as a volunteer in the Philippines in the early 1990s. “What I found there was humbling; much worse than I could ever have imagined,” Monse recalled.

“Many countries without a tradition of public or private oral health care look at health systems in high-income countries as models, although it is neither attainable nor realistic for them,” Benzian said.

What can policymakers in poorer countries with a modest health budget do? “The key lies not in oral health care itself. For those who do not have access to oral care look at health systems in high-income countries as models, although it is neither attainable nor realistic for them.”

Legislation too can lead to improvements in personal oral health. “The government must create an environment in which the public is encouraged and supported to stay healthy,” stated Benzian. Thus, self-care products should be as affordable as possible and harmful products that pose risks to health, such as tobacco, squatting and alcohol, should be subject to tight government regulation. Furthermore, especially in the developing world, it is important to monitor the quality of fluoride toothpaste. “In a country like the Netherlands, you do not need to be concerned about this, but in many low- or middle-income countries, for example, many of the toothpastes available contain only little or no fluoride. Therefore, they are in...”

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific Edition No. 1+2/2014
**Long-term solutions**

Among Dutch dental care professionals, there are many examples of colleagues performing valuable work in developing countries. What can a dentist do to make a relevant contribution in these countries? Monse noted that initiatives do not necessarily need to be carried out in faraway places. "Each country has its own developing world. Look for the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in your immediate environment. Since you are familiar with the system, you can achieve a lot."

Anyone wanting to work abroad should do so in a responsible way, van Palenstein Helderman describes the wrong way: "In the past, some dentists have set up their entire practice in a developing country and started to provide the type of care with which they were familiar during a short-term campaign. That way you create dependencies among the local communities and devalue the existing health care system because once you’re gone, no one can continue the work you’ve started." Instead, he refers dental professionals to an organisation like Dental Health International Nederland (DHIN), which assists local organisations in developing countries in oral health projects. DHIN offers the starting point for Dutch oral care professionals for their activities as a volunteer.

Benjamin believes that volunteers should not provide stand-alone dental care. "The developing world is not a playground for under-graduate dental students or an area to try out treatments or act without due care. You have the responsibility to help each patient the best way possible, otherwise you cause damage." In addition, he warned against well-intended enthusiastic actions without first carrying out the necessary introspection, planning and co-ordination with local stakeholders. "Thoughts like ‘the situation is so bad, I provide nonstop treatment’ are understandable. But that way you don’t improve the system. You have to realise that you are just a visitor and therefore you need to support long-term solutions, such as training and education of local health care providers. That way you contribute to sustainable local capacity.”

If you are a dentist and you have the opportunity to speak to policymakers, seize the chance with both hands. "Most important of all is not to follow the blame approach but to identify the problems in a diplomatic manner and contribute to possible solutions. That way you subtly plant a seed in somebody’s mind. Furthermore, a positive ‘trigger’ can play an important role. I know of cases where decision-makers suddenly invested significantly in oral health care because, for example, their daughter was relieved of her chronic toothache by a dentist. If you experience something yourself and can relate to an issue on a personal level, the urgency of the problem becomes more concrete,” Benjamin advised.

However, he emphasised that the political priority of oral health in most countries remains low and every effort should be made to change this situation. “It starts with each and every one of us: talk and seek collaboration with your medical colleagues, work with a paradigm to raise awareness of oral health wherever possible.”

---

**...much can be achieved with relatively little means.**

![Traxodent Ad](Image)

Go to www.premusa.com to view online tutorial!

**Traxodent is gentle, absorbent and fast.** The soft paste produces gentle pressure on the sulcus while it absorbs excess crevicular fluid. The aluminium chloride creates an astringent effect without irritating or discoloring surrounding tissue. Traxodent provides predictable hemostasis and retraction in less time and with greater comfort.

Easy, effective hemostasis and retraction. Award winning Traxodent® is dispensed from a sleek syringe with a bendable tip that permits easy application of Traxodent directly into the sulcus. After two minutes it is rinsed, leaving an open, retracted sulcus.

Try it – starter and value packs are available through your authorized dealer.

---

DTAP0114_06-07_News 10.02.14 16:44 Seite 2

**DENTAL TRIBUNE Asia Pacific Edition No. 1+2/2014**

**World News 7**

**Premier® Dental Products Company • 888-670-0100 • www.premusa.com** / Cosmetic • Endo/Restorative • Hygiene/Prophy • Instruments • Prosthetic

1. Strategic Dental Marketing, May 2013 | Clinical images courtesy of Sheldon Mehler DMD, Teaneck, NJ.