Australian coalition clashes over dental care
Labor’s scrap of coverage scheme snubs Green party

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HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Nine months after its formation, the government coalition between the Labor and Green parties in Australia is being severely tested regarding the introduction of a new dental subsidy scheme. The clash came after Labor Health Minister Nicola Roxon in an interview told The Australian newspaper that the scheme would be scrapped from the next federal budget in May in order to return the nation’s balance to a surplus in 2012/13.

Improved funding of oral health care for low-income Australians was one of the key motivations for the Greens in forming a government coalition with Labor when they failed to gain the majority vote during last year’s federal elections against the Conservatives. Led by Senator Bob Brown, the party has been pushing for an extension of public dental care services to wait for long periods before they receive treatment. The situation is particularly severe in the southern parts of the country, where patient waiting periods have been reported as up to two years.

Currently, a significant number of Australians using public dental health care services have found that the government would be more effective in treating the problem than the proposed scheme in the May budget.

Ms Roxon said that Labor is still open for discussions with the Greens about investment in dental health and other neglected areas of health care. She emphasised that despite the coalition’s agreement, a comprehensive dental scheme would not be achievable in the next budget, but that the government would be committed to keeping its promise in the longer term.

The MDA and Colgate are aiming for at least 50,000 dental checks to be performed throughout the month of April. Malaysia’s Oral Health Month has been held annually since 2004.

Fluoride in focus at Thailand meeting

Effective strategies on fluoride administration have been recently presented at a workshop held by the Dental Association of Thailand in cooperation with the World Health Organization. The workshop was held by the Thai Dental Federation and the International Association of Dental Research in Bangkok in Thailand. The meeting, which saw participants from over 16 Asian countries participating, aimed at new programs to advocate for more effective use of fluoride in their respective countries.

Currently, the fluoridation of water is only common practice in some Asian countries such as Australia, China, Brunei, Malaysia and New Zealand. Fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinses are widely available; however, improper brushing techniques and poor awareness particularly in rural areas often negate their preventive potential.

Indian students demand extra posts

Dental students in India have protested for the creation of additional posts for dentists in public hospitals, as well as primary health care centres. Despite having a degree, thousands of graduates in the country are currently unable to find a job due to the lack of dental posts available in the public sector.

Malaysia kicks off oral health campaign

The Malaysian Dental Association (MDA) and dental consumables manufacturer Colgate have launched a nationwide campaign to improve the neglected oral health of Malaysians. During Oral Health Month in April, free dental checks will be provided to the public in 711 clinics around the country. Educational and promotional events in shopping malls and supermarkets will also form part of the campaign.

The Oral Health Month campaign complements the country’s National Oral Health Plan 2010, which aims to create awareness and educate the public on better oral hygiene. According to the Ministry of Health, currently nine out of 10 Malaysians and more than 50% of all children suffer from tooth decay, figures also confirmed by the World Health Organization.

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