Report paints devastating picture of dental care utilisation in Australia

Daniel Zimmermann

TOKYO, Japan: Research institutions in the Asia Pacific region have increased their output of scientific publications, new figures from the Nature Publishing Group (NPG) in Tokyo indicate. According to the annual Nature Publishing Index made public last week, researchers from the region were co-authors of one out of four papers published in NPG's Nature research journals worldwide in 2011.

Despite the recession and March earthquake and tsunami, researchers from Japan were the most productive (involved in 10 percent of all papers), followed by contributors from China, Australia, the Republic of Korea and Singapore. An increasing output of papers by researchers in Taiwan and India was also observed, which were ranked sixth and seventh in the index, respectively, and these countries have the potential to rival Singapore next year, an NPG spokesperson said.

One in four papers published in Nature research journals had at least one co-author from the Asia Pacific region.

In addition, 14 institutions in the region have been included in the Nature Publishing Index's Global Top 100 research institutions, with the University of Tokyo ranking highest in the region at fifth place with an annual output of 109 articles.

The index, which is updated every week, currently covers 17 research journals published by NPG. Although the Nature journals have limited coverage of clinical medicine, several papers were published last year on new technologies and techniques that could have an impact on future dental materials or treatment procedures.

The majority of papers in 2011 still came from the USA, which has seven institutions in the top ten list of research institutions, including Harvard University in Boston and Stanford University. From Europe, only the French National Centre for Scientific Research and the Max Planck Institutes in Germany made it to the top ten.

Low-income Australians who are receiving payments from Centrelink, a governmental welfare programme, are currently eligible for dental benefits through Health Care Cards. According to the latest government statistics, approximately 12% of the Australian population is estimated to fall under this category.

Generally, only every second dentate Australian reported having visited a dentist within the past 12 months. Six percent of all adults were found to be edentulous.

Asians catch up in global research index

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CANBERRA, Australia: Findings from a telephone survey conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on the use of dental services in 2008 seem to confirm the poor state of Australia’s public dental health care system. According to the report released in March by the government agency in Canberra, only 25% of patients eligible for government-funded dental care currently seek treatment in public dental clinics.

The financial burden of treatment was found to be the major reason that people did not see a dentist. Of those who actually visited a public dentist, more than 50% waited at least a year for a dental appointment, which is in line with results from a recent survey by the Government of Western Australia’s Department of Health, which found that 24,000 patients in communities around the city of Perth are currently waiting for treatment in public dental hospitals.

Most people on benefits also visited their dentists for a problem rather than a check-up and had more extractions done, the report states.

Findings

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