Asia News

Anti-tobacco programme set up in Indian dental clinics

Country also needs national policy on oral health, IDA Secretary-General says

From news reports

CHENNAI, India: The Secretary-General of the Indian Dental Association, Dr Ashok Dhoble, has announced the launch of a new research and survey programme to reduce the incidence of tobacco-related oral diseases in India. For the programme, thousands of dental clinics in the country will be used as tobacco-intervention centres and engage in oral cancer detection in patients who come for dental treatment. Data from those screenings will also be collected through a special network.

Currently, almost half a million people in India die from oral cancer each year, mainly because they chew or smoke tobacco. Dr Dhoble, who spoke to reporters at Dentists’ Day celebrations in Fort Kochi in southern India in early March, said that if detected at the right time, those cases could be not only treated, but also prevented.

He demanded the introduction of a national oral health policy by the Union government. He said that even though most dental diseases could be treated, the number of people in the country suffering from these conditions is so large that it was not possible to treat even half of them. Treatment costs are too high and many regions lack sufficient manpower, he said.

According to the latest statistics from India’s Ministry of Health, nearly 70 per cent of children in urban areas have dental decay and over 80 per cent of adults suffer from gum disease. A national policy would complement the Association’s programmes in order to reduce the high figures of oral diseases, including oral cancer, Dr Dhoble added.

Public dental clinics in Singapore charge for missed appointments

From news reports

SINGAPORE: As the first health-care institution in Singapore, the National Healthcare Group (NHG) is charging a deposit fee to patients who do not attend their appointments at the group’s five dental clinics.

According to reports in the newspaper Straits Times, the fee of S$8 (US$6) will be waived for regular patients and those on public assistance or Medifund schemes. It will not be forfeited if the appointment is cancelled or rescheduled within at least three working days.

NHG dental clinics have seen a growing number of patients lately. In 2008, almost 70,000 patients sought treatment, which is an increase of more than 10 per cent compared to 2007. However, four out of ten patients failed to keep their appointments, wasting slots that could have been used for patients who require treatment.

In the past, telephone messages were left and reminder letters were sent to patients a few days before their dental appointments, a NHG spokesperson said. Patients were also sent SMS messages, but these measures did not yield a “positive improvement”, he added.

Public dental clinics like those of the NHG group operate on an appointment-only basis. Walk-in cases are also attended to but only after the patients with appointments have received treatment. Not showing up on the designated date means that other patients are deprived of an earlier appointment. Waiting times are typically between three months and half a year.

Other clinics have declined to charge for missed appointments.