Taiwan to attend World Health Assembly

From news reports

According to a survey by the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, more than half of private dental colleges and schools across Japan fell short of enrolment quotas for the academic year. Three schools even saw enrolment fall by 40 per cent, which numbers between 51 and 43 students. The number of people who took entrance examinations for private dental colleges or schools this year was 4,975, a sharp fall from over 10,000 in previous years.

According to major prep schools and other sources, the biggest reason for the fall in enrolment is a belief that the nation has a surplus of dentists. In 1990, there were 74,000 dentists, the number of which rose each year to 87,000 in 2006; yet, there was no rise in total dental care costs over this period. This led to excessive competition among dental clinics.

The fall in enrolment is expected to hurt finances at dental schools because of a decrease in income streams, such as students’ enrolment fees and initial payments for thefreshmen year, which are usually between US$72,000 and US$10,000 per student. The Japanese Association of Private Dental Schools plans to investigate possible countermeasures, out of fear that the shortage could lead to the collapse of the nation’s dental care system.

Observers say it will be difficult for colleges and schools to draw up effective countermeasures to reverse the situation any time soon. Commenting on the issue, Toshi-kazu Yasui, Vice Chairman of the Japanese Association of Private Dental Schools, told Yomiuri Shimbun, “We had anticipated some fall in enrolment but not anything like this. We’re going to have to explain to the public how important dental care is.”

Taiwan officials say their exclusion from the WHO and its annual assemblies has made it tough to handle major health issues such as SARS in 2003. The WHA is the supreme decision-making body for the WHO. It is held from 18–27 May 2009 in Geneva, attended by delegates from all 193 members.

Edited by Claudia Salwiczek, DTI

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Ivoclar Vivadent AG
Ivoclar Vivadent Marketing Ltd. (Swiss Office) Switzerland Frohburgerstrasse 35, CH-9592 Schaan Telephone: +423 235 33 60 

Ivoclar Vivadent Marketing Ltd. (Asian Office) India

5th Floor, Meeting Room, 11/F, Wharf Industrial Centre, 77-87 Green Lane, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, P.O. Box 6360, Hong Kong

Ivoclar Vivadent Marketing Ltd. (Asian Office) Singapore

503/504 Raheja Plaza, 503/504, Raheja Plaza, Mumbai 400 053, India

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