Americans support dental coverage in health care reforms

Over 60 per cent of Americans consider dental coverage part of an overall health care reform by the Obama legislation, a new public opinion survey has shown. The poll released at the launch of National Smile Month in June and commissioned by Oral Health America revealed that four in five adults agree that dental benefits are as important as general medical benefits in an overall health care benefit package.

Many poor and lower-middle class families in the US currently do not receive enough dental care, in part because dentists prefer patients who have private insurance or can pay in cash. The lack of dental care is also not restricted to the poor, recent data shows. Experts on oral health say that about 100 million Americans have no access to adequate care.

In a recent letter to US president Barack Obama, the American Dental Association (ADA), which represents over 157,000 dentists in the US, recently urged the government to pay more attention to dental health care in the ongoing health-policy debate. “Acknowledging that the majority of Americans have access to excellent and relatively affordable dental care […], we are compelled to point out that too many low-income Americans still suffer needlessly from dental disease,” the letter states. “More must be done to ensure that all Americans have access to quality oral-health services.”

The ADA recommends increasing funding to the nationwide Medicaid health programme, rebuilding the public dental-health infrastructure and supporting community-based prevention measures, such as fluoridation or school-based education programmes.

Obama’s health care reform initiative aims to extend health coverage to 45 million uninsured people in the US, as well as to preserve consumer choice and lower rising health care costs, by cutting more than US$200 billion in reimbursements to hospitals over the next decade. He has also announced his support of the introduction of a public health insurance plan, a concept similar to the failed health care plan developed by his current Secretary of State and former First Lady Hillary Clinton back in 1994.

The government’s health-care reform proposals are opposed by the US Congress and other organisations like the American Medical Association, who say that the realisation would cost a total of US$1 trillion over the next decade and still leave millions of people in the US uninsured.
FDI pushes caries initiative with Rio conference

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany/FERNEY-VOLTAIRE, France: In order to address the global burden of dental caries, the FDI World Dental Federation has announced its first Global Caries Initiative Conference, which is to be held in July in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The event, organised in collaboration with the International Association for Dental Research and the Brazilian Dental Association, will mark the start of the organisation’s ten-year campaign to eliminate tooth decay by the year 2020, officials said.

According to the FDI, caries remains the most common dental disease worldwide. Although there has been a decline of dental decay in industrialised countries in recent years through fluoridated toothpaste and improved dental hygiene, in most low-income countries, up to 90 per cent of all people suffer from the condition, which often remains untreated.

The Rio conference is intended to address these inequalities amongst other topics. It will be for dental educators and scientists, as well as presidents of dental associations and government dental officers. Speakers from North America and Europe have been invited to address the need for changing the current paradigm of diagnosis, prevention and restoration of dental caries, and to present the implications of these for its future prevention and management.

The conference is currently open for registration. Fees are €80 for delegates from Latin America and €180 for those from other countries.

Swine flu could spread through teeth

Penny Palmer

LONDON, UK: Bad dental hygiene could increase the risk of swine flu, according to the British Dental Health Foundation. The organisation’s recent National Dental Survey has found that dreadful dental habits are helping spread germs, as 40 per cent of the UK population admit to picking their teeth with their fingernails. It has also revealed that people pick their teeth with everyday items such as earrings, credit cards, paper clips, paper and even screwdrivers.

Foundation Chief Executive Dr Nigel Carter said: “Hygiene warnings have been made clear ever since the swine flu outbreak, and it is worrying that these habits have been revealed as the numbers affected continue to rise. Personal hygiene should be a top priority for all.”

The Department of Health (DH) in the UK recently issued guidance to dental practices on procedures should the swine flu outbreak become a pandemic. It also warned dentists that fewer patients are likely to attend dental practices for treatment during a pandemic, as illness and fear of infection will encourage patients to cancel or reschedule appointments.

All patients should be screened by telephone for symptoms of flu before attending the practice and again on arrival at the practice, said the DH. Treatment of infected patients should be limited to pain relief and should avoid aerosol-generating procedures where possible. Also, infected patients should be segregated from healthy patients.

There are currently 1,752 confirmed cases of swine flu in the UK, the country’s Health Protection Agency reports.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann)
GLASGOW, UK: A new global network that aims to unite dentists of Indian origin from around the world was recently launched at the British Dental Association conference in Glasgow, the UK. Created by former Chief Dental Officer of England, Prof. Raman Bedi, whose parents migrated from India in the 1950s, Dentalghar is expected to link thousands of dentists who share common values.

Members of Dentalghar, which means the ‘home of dentistry’, will be able to contribute to a number of polls, surveys and articles, a spokeswoman for Smile-on told Dental Tribune.

Professionals looking to study abroad will also find information on work permits, visas and qualifications on the platform. She added that there will also be an opportunity to win bursaries and to contribute to volunteering in the UK and globally.

Prof. Bedi, who hopes that Dentalghar will become a ‘major force in the industry’, said: “The focus is on the subcontinent (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and the diverse ‘Asian’ dental communities that have sprung up in regions as far apart as the US, Canada, the UK, South Africa, Singapore, Australia and the Middle East. We have more worldwide dentists of BIPS (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan) origin than our medical colleagues.” This factor, among others, gave rise to the momentum for starting Dentalghar, Bedi added.

“With an increasing number of dentists of Indian origin and a growing economy in India, Dentalghar will help us to work collectively,” Bedi said.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann)

Dental snapshots in 3-D

Under contract by the German dental company Hint-El, an expert team at the Fraunhofer Society in Jena, Germany, has developed a new optical digitisation system that scans the oral cavity and captures 3-D data of the teeth, using camera optics. The system is designed to facilitate the production of dental prostheses, in order to supersede the intricate and laborious route from bite impression and plaster mould to model scanning in dental laboratories.

“The 3-D coordinates of the tooth surface can be determined on the basis of measurements taken in the patient’s mouth,” says Dr Peter Kühlstedt, Group Manager for 3-D Measurement Technology at the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering IOF. “After an all-around measurement, it is even possible to represent the complete jaw arch as a virtual computer image.”

In order to obtain precise results, the researchers have utilised fringe projections in which a projector shines strips of light on the tooth area to be measured. From the phase-shifted images, a evaluation software determines the geometric contour data of the tooth. Two camera optics provide the sensor chip with image information from different measurement perspectives. After the pixel-precise comparison of various camera images, the evaluation programme identifies any image faults and removes them from the complete image.

Since patients are moving while the images are being, the researchers have ensured that the process is quick. “The image sequence for each measurement position is captured in less than 200 milliseconds,” explains Dr Kühlstedt.