Dear reader,

A friend of mine recently had a bacterial infection. In telling me about his problems, the first thing he mentioned was that he had experienced symptoms of dry mouth and matured biofilm. He had also suffered from hypersensitive teeth.

My friend’s example, though trivial in nature, is a good example by which to demonstrate the way the oral cavity functions as a window to our state of health. Every day, the salivary glands secrete over 1.5 litres of saliva into the oral cavity, carrying with it valuable information. These biomarkers can be from sites of disease, or the salivary glands themselves can produce surrogate biomarkers of disease. The good news is that the information provided by these can be obtained non-invasively, painlessly, and with no embarrassment to the patient—without needles or cringing.

Owing to these salivary properties, a dental examination today is no longer only about teeth and gums. Dentists should be aware that they are probably the first to detect signs of systemic diseases in their patients. Take HIV/AIDS for example: despite new, effective medication, the latest infection rates still demonstrate a continued increase in poor and developing countries alike. According to a recent report by UNAIDS, for example, an estimated 50 million women in Asia alone are at risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS by their intimate partners in the next decade. Early detection could significantly reduce morbidity here.

Oral fluid testing technologies are under development and already in use in several dental offices in Europe and the US. It will be years, perhaps even decades, before these tests are a regular part of every visit to the dentist, but there is no doubt that they will play a valuable part in the management and control of worldwide epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS or cancer.

Yours sincerely,
Daniel Zimmermann
Group Editor
Dental Tribune International

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**ASEAN agreement penalises Filipino dentists**

The ASEAN member countries’ decision on foreign reciprocity or the Mutual Recognition Agreement comes at the heels of the economic global recession. The need for economic survival for everyone amidst these stressful times has come to the assistance of professionals, especially those in the healthcare sector. This ensures patients of a high level of quality of treatment. Unfortunately, not all participating countries in the ASEAN region have established guidelines to ensure the professional regulating bodies of their particular governments on this matter. In countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, to name a few, who had these guidelines long before this agreement took place, the system in the Philippines was stopped for almost ten years, owing to a bill filed by a senator who argued that the CPE units be optional rather than mandatory. Recently, owing to the passage of the new dental law in the Philippines, the acquisition of CPE credit units became mandatory again, for which we are so thankful, but unfortunately, the almost ten-year hiatus has already cost precious credit units earned by our dentists.

As a certain amount of CPE units required of an applicant, it is possible that dentists from countries with no clear set of rules on their acquisition and recording may be denied employment, simply because their governments have not taken steps to ensure that all credit units earned by attending seminars, symposiums, conventions and the like have been properly recorded in the educational programme of their professional regulating bodies. If that in-depth consultation with the various heads of professions involved in this agreement should have taken place prior to forging ties with our ASEAN neighbours this could have led to further ironing out of kinks in the programme, thereby making it a more effective way to meet the educational needs of the dental community, and public health practitioners to identify best practices in implementing evidence-based oral health policies, identify research gaps, and evaluate public health interventions.

The congress will culminate with a declaration, resulting from the ideas shared and progress made among participants.

**Dr Leo Gerald R. de Castro**

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