**Children's oral health at stake as US votes for reform**

Daniel Zimmerman

NEW YORK, NY, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: Dental health associations in the US have hailed the decision of the US Senate to recognise a number of measures for improving the oral health status of children, including expanded coverage for pediatric oral health services in its health reform bill. The new health legislation, which passed the House of Representatives and its crucial first vote in the Senate in November, also contains a number of measures for improving prevention, training and resources for tracking and monitoring oral health data amongst vulnerable populations.

Dental caries is one of the most prevalent health problems in the US, and disparities in oral health are evident across ages. A report by the US National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center states that although more than 90 per cent of general dentists in the US provide care to children and adolescents, very few provide care to children under four. Amongst children and adolescents from families with low incomes, nearly 80 per cent of decayed primary teeth have not been restored in children between the ages of two and five, the report states.

“The Senate has taken a historic step toward safeguarding the oral health of millions of Americans,” said Dr Burt Edelstein, chair and founder of Children’s Dental Health Project, a non-profit organisation based in Washington, DC. “As the bill moves toward passage in the Senate and a conference with the House, it is vital to preserve these provisions.”

“We are confident that members of the House and Senate will remain steadfast in their commitment to oral health and will work together to ensure that the oral health measures contained in this legislation remain strong,” he added.

The Senate version of the sweeping health bill, which is the centrepiece of President Obama’s social policy and will cost more than US$800 billion over the next ten years, would extend coverage to 36 million people without insurance, while creating a government health insurance programme.

**New oral health guidelines for people with diabetes**

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) recently presented new guidelines for the oral-health care of patients with diabetes at the World Diabetes Congress in Montreal in Canada. The document, which is the result of collaboration between the IDF and the FDI World Dental Federation, reviews the latest clinical evidence of the oral health–diabetes relationship and provides dental professionals with recommendations regarding implementation of the guidelines.

Growing evidence affirms that poor oral health has a negative impact on the general health of people living with the condition. The IDF estimates that 285 million people worldwide will be living with diabetes in 2010. Numbers in regions like Africa and Asia are expected to increase by 50 per cent in the next twenty years, owing to economic development and the change of lifestyles.

**WHO meeting decides to phase down amalgam**

At a joint meeting of the WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme in November, experts have announced their support to “phase down” dental mercury use worldwide. Their decision follows a letter signed by over 70 non-governmental organisations from around the world calling on the organisation to establish a schedule to phase out the use of dental mercury fillings as soon as possible. The group was also assessing alternative dental filling materials, such as composites and glass ionomers, for future use in dentistry.

Although banned in some markets, dental amalgam is still used in some developed and most developing countries. It is widely acknowledged that it poses a health risk to pregnant women and young children.

**PRP therapy helpful for implants**

New research has found that platelet-rich plasma therapy (PRP) offers potential for accelerated healing of dental implant procedures. Platelet-rich plasma, which is obtained from the patient’s own blood and triggers rapid growth of bone and soft tissue, recently gained acceptance in orthopedics and sports medicine.

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