European Commission reviews environmental aspects of mercury in dental fillings

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HONG KONG: The European Commission has decided to examine the risks of using mercury in amalgam fillings. As some member states have already restricted the use of dental amalgam substantially, the Commission wants to assess this issue in detail with due consideration of all relevant aspects of its life cycle. The study is to be concluded in June 2012.

The focus of the study is on the environmental rather than on the health aspects of dental amalgam. While scientific debate on the potential health effects of the use of dental amalgam is still controversial, the need for proper management of dental amalgam waste is not disputed. It is expected that a significant quantity of mercury originating from dental fillings, estimated at over 1,000 tonnes for the entire EU population, will probably ultimately end up in the environment, e.g. by release into the soil via burial, or even by direct emission into the atmosphere following cremation, unless relevant policy measures are considered.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific has learned that the Commission recently awarded a contract to a consultant to investigate the current situation in relation to the quantity of mercury used in dental amalgam in the EU and identify measures that could reduce its environmental impact.

The study’s findings will be presented and discussed during a workshop in Brussels in March 2012 and potential stakeholders will have the opportunity to give feedback. According to the European Commission, interested parties are welcome to provide input during the process and express their interest in participating in the workshop.

The Commission will take the results of the study into account, as well as relevant international developments, before proceeding with potential policy measures.

Under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, discussions on the reduction of mercury use are also taking place internationally. Negotiations, in which the European Commission represents the EU, started in 2010 and shall be completed by 2013. Dental amalgam is amongst the products currently discussed as potential candidates for being regulated.

EU president José Manuel Barroso (left) speaking to EC member Janusz Lewandowski at a press conference in Brussels. The Commission recently decided to evaluate the impact of amalgam fillings on the environment. (DTI/Photo courtesy of the European Union, Belgium)

India–Malaysia agreement to ease employment for dentists

Requirements for dentists from India and Malaysia to work in the other country have been relaxed by a new economic operation agreement that came into operation in July. The agreement, which was signed by the countries’ ministers of trade in October last year, is intended to remove restrictive provisions such as economic needs or labour market tests from the provisions for temporary movement of professionals, including doctors and dentists. It also aims to increase bilateral trade and investment flows.

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Trade and Industry, India is currently the country’s largest trading partner, accounting for more than US$2 billion in exports. The new agreement is expected to boost bilateral trade to US$15 billion by 2015.

Less wisdom teeth in Japanese women

Young Japanese women are losing their wisdom teeth and bite force, researchers at Tsurumi Junior College in Yokohama have found. According to the newspaper The Mainichi Daily News, the researchers, Prof. Masatoshi Goto and Nobuko Tanaka looked at moulds of the upper and lower jaws of 124 female students between the ages of 18 and 20. Only six individuals had a full set of 52 teeth. Four out of five women were missing wisdom teeth in their upper jaw. Furthermore, the second molars showed signs of retrogressing into a more triangular shape. Signs of retrogression were also seen in the first molars. Wisdom teeth in the lower jaw were a little more common, but still missing in 72% of the students.

Neither Mrs Tanaka nor Prof. Goto was able to offer an explanation as to why the teeth seemed to be disappearing but they intend to continue their research in order to collect more data in this regard. Meanwhile, they have suggested that infants be given hard foods to chew on in order to develop their teeth.

BIOLASE opens new HQ in Asia

The US dental laser manufacturer BIOLASE Technology recently opened a new Asia-Pacific headquarters in Shanghai in China featuring state-of-the-art clinical and laser service training facilities and a showroom. A direct sales office located in Mumbai will support the company’s operations in India.

Relief donations to Japan continue

In order to support the recovery process in Japan, Finnish manufacturer of dental devices Planmeca has donated a dental and panoramic imaging unit to a temporary dental clinic that has been set up in the affected Tohoku region by the Japanese government in cooperation with the Japanese Dental Association.