Unlicensed dentists plague the Republic of Fiji

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SUVA, Fiji: Locals and visitors to the Fiji islands have been warned by the country’s consumer council to be aware of fake dentists or those practising without a proper licence after several cases of dental malpractice were reported throughout the island state in which patients were left with pain or lost their teeth owing to unprofessional treatment.

The Ministry of Health also released information recently about a Chinese couple who had been operating an illegal dental surgery for years in their home near the capital Suva. According to the Department of Immigration, they are currently being investigated and could face deportation owing to breach of the Immigration Act, despite the woman being a dental officer in her home country.

Prior to this, a woman from Canada had one of her front teeth extracted by an employee of a dental clinic who did not have a licence to practise dentistry but had posed as a dentist.

“The council is urging the public to be mindful of such unscrupulous dentists and run background checks on them before seeking their services,” the council advised in a press release. “People must ask the name of the dentist who is to perform the procedures on them and also ask to see his or her registration certificate.”

Dental professionals wishing to practise in the Fiji islands have to register with the Fiji Medical and Dental Council. In recent years, however, an increasing number of dentists have not renewed their annual licence, a circumstance that forced the regulatory body to run a widespread public campaign recently and threaten unwilling practitioners with disciplinary action. According to the council, they were also informed of a number of cases of dental graduates being employed by dental clinics and practices without them first being registered.

Several cases of dental malpractice were recently reported to Fijian authorities. (DTI/Photo Teerawut Masawat)

Fiji currently has slightly over 100 dentists, most of whom work for the government. Costs for dental treatment have increased in recent years owing to expensive imports of dental equipment, according to the Fiji Dental Association, which makes the cost of regular treatment prohibitively high for most patients.

The results of the last oral health survey conducted in 2004 indicate that caries prevalence among all age groups in the country is high.

Statistics from a new campaign launched in 2011 are expected to be released later this year.
Christian organisation in the Philippines breaks dental world record

by the mission in the Philippines’ capital in the second weekend of July, according to Guinness World Records in London.

The previous record was 3,577 people, checked during an oral health event organised by the Indian Dental Association and Wrigley in Mumbai in October 2009. With 66,522 people checked, India still holds the world record for the most people involved in a dental examination in multiple locations since November 2010.

Guinness currently recognises a couple of dental records, including the longest tooth extracted and the oldest person to have received dental implants.

In addition to the most dental checks performed on one day, the Manila mission also broke two other records in the most blood pressure readings and blood glucose level tests categories. According to Guinness representative Tarika Vara, it was the first time that three records were broken simultaneously. She remarked that the standard of the health checks was very high and of great benefit to all those involved.

Over 1,000 medical and dental professionals are reported to have taken part in the event, which saw overall attendance by 100,000 people. The mission also provided medication, minor surgical treatment and relief food packs.

Dental workers get a breather

JAKARTA, Indonesia: The Indonesian ministry of health has delayed the deadline for a new law that could mean the end for thousands of small dental businesses in the South-East Asian country.

The regulations, originally intended to take effect in April, are aimed at preventing dental technicians, also called tukang gigi, from performing dental procedures on patients.

The postponement is the ministry’s response to the protests by thousands of dental workers, who claim that the ban will force them out of business. It has announced that it will use the six months for providing training opportunities to the affected workers in order to improve the situation and lessen the risk of maltreatment of patients.

An estimated 75,000 dental technicians are currently working in Indonesia, of which a large portion have been offering basic dental procedures, such as extractions and fillings, in addition to dentures, without a licence from the health authorities. In recent years, many low-income households who cannot afford regular treatment have become dependent on tukang gigi as their only means of receiving some form of dental care.

According to figures from the World Health Organization in Geneva, Indonesia has a current shortage of approximately 4,000 dentists. The situation is the most severe in many rural parts of the country, where oral health care is almost non-existent.

Representatives of dental technician organisations welcomed the decision to postpone the deadline but said that the six-month period would be too short to be able to improve the situation and that the government’s intentions beyond September still remain unclear.

They called on the ministry to develop a long-term plan for the profession, rather than punishing them for the misconduct of a few.