Put teeth into oral healthcare management

Go beyond preventive efforts to root out decay that could cause severe illness

Professor Patrick Finbarr Allen

Our teeth serve the important functions of chewing, absorbing food, and digestion and also play a vital role in speech. But they are often considered more important for cosmetic reasons. There is no doubt that having a grin is regarded as a positive sign of health.

I well remember one of my patients who was so concerned about his discolored teeth that he never smiled and kept his hand close to his mouth whenever speaking. His unhappy toothiness affected his whole life as a whole, as well as greatly his social life, such as meeting friends or having romantic relationships.

However, good oral health goes beyond having a set of white teeth or a beautiful smile. The state of your oral health – your gums, teeth, jaws, and mouth – can be an important indicator of your general health, the health of the rest of your body.

Increasingly, research is showing that oral health is linked to wider chronic diseases, from diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and respiratory health.

For example, risk factors that cause chronic oral diseases are also linked to one disease. Many studies include smoking and excessive alcohol use.

The United States National Institutes of Health reports that individuals who smoke have an increased risk of tooth loss.

In addition, the treatment of chronic diseases can adversely affect one’s overall oral health. For instance, patients with chronic conditions may be at risk of developing oral health problems.

To the contrary, the integration of chronic disease management efforts on one’s overall health, such as oral health, can help improve outcomes for chronic conditions.

I have seen this phenomenon many times over a 40-year career as an oral health care professional. A recent patient in the replacement of missing teeth, for example, was a patient who had been waiting for her teeth to be completed after the surgery. This patient spent three months, having waited in a medical office, to be made of an artificial denture, a root canal, and the fitting of a dental implant.

Our dental implants, a root canal, and the fitting of a dental implant are generally an excellent solution to missing teeth.

A GROWING PROBLEM

Singaporeans have done well in dental care, with the dental health of Singaporeans being among the best in the world.

The Ministry of Health has been providing affordable dental care to Singaporeans of all ages and has been actively promoting good oral hygiene from every young age through kindergarten and primary schools.

The Community Health Services Scheme (CHESS) and the Primary Dental Care Programme (PDPC) have successfully expanded the range of dental care services to the public.

Poor diets lead to lack of nutrients and vitamins such as calcium, vitamin D, and magnesium, which is important for bone health.

One in five individuals aged 65 years or older has dental caries, while one in 10 has gum disease.

Meanwhile, patients with chronic conditions often have trouble accessing necessary dental care.

PATIENTS AND DENTISTS

Oral health care services have been integrated into general health care services. This approach involves dental health care, chronic disease management, and general health care services.

The Ministry of Health has a national oral health survey, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Health early this year, to provide a comprehensive oral health report.

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