FDI POLICY STATEMENT

Oral health for healthy ageing

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CONTEXT

As the world's population ages, the cumulative effect of oral health on healthy ageing becomes more significant. While a healthy and functional dentition is a fundamental part of general health and wellbeing, oral health professionals should promote and provide better integration of oral health care into general health care systems as a life course approach in support of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030.

SCOPE

The purpose of this policy statement is to raise awareness of the fundamental role of oral health practitioners in screening, prevention treatment and rehabilitation and that appropriate referrals are provided as a component of an integrated community health care system. These services are crucial for preventing and treating oral diseases as well as promoting oral functions, like eating, talking and interacting with others, which are linked to the delay and prevention of frailty. These services are also crucial for their contribution to the prevention or stabilization of certain general health conditions such as noncommunicable diseases, infectious diseases and neurocognitive disorders.

DEFINITION

Healthy ageing: Reacquiring and maintaining the functional capacity that promotes well-being as people age.

PRINCIPLES

This policy statement calls on oral health professionals and organizations to go further than preventing and treating oral diseases, and to work in partnership with their local communities to develop appropriate and consistent methods for evaluating and screening oral functions at all health care levels. Oral health practitioners should identify and monitor oral function decline. Oral health practitioners should attempt to measure and document even slight decreases in components of oral function such as tongue function, lip function, saliva production and eating and swallowing functions. Additionally, using screening programmes, such as the Kihon checklist[4], can expand

traditional dental evaluation. These would aim to measure and document even slight decreases in components of oral function such as tongue function, lip function, saliva production and eating and swallowing functions.

POLICY

Access to adequate oral health care is fundamental at all stages of life, especially in older populations, in order to establish and maintain healthy ageing and improve quality of life. FDI recommends the following actions:

Oral health practitioners should:

- understand and appreciate the impact of ageing on the ability to perform daily activities, such as oral hygiene;
- detect and manage poor oral health among older people to prevent frailty;
- engage in cooperative efforts with their local communities that focus on person-centred assessment, screening of oral functions and assessments of oral health related quality of life;
- provide education to maintain oral health and the functions it supports: eating, talking and smiling, as well as general health;
- be integrated as part of the aged care multidisciplinary team at all health care levels.

Qualified providers of oral health education should:

- educate students in the competencies related to geriatric oral health practice.

National Dental Associations and related organizations should:

- urge policymakers to adopt a strategy centred on the evaluation and monitoring of older adults' oral function, oral health quality of life and the subsequent multidisciplinary response (including referrals and preventive interventions, etc.) as a shift towards a person-centred strategy built on interprofessional cooperation;
- encourage policymakers’ understanding that improving health in older adults should involve reorienting and sustained healthy ageing policies to include greater concentration and action on oral health;
- urge policymakers to plan national oral health services for older adults and improve integration of oral health services in primary health care as part of universal health coverage;
- support training and education of non-oral health professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses and dieticians) in the oral health for older adults to improve integration with primary care.

KEYWORDS

Older adults, healthy ageing, oral functions, oral health professionals

DISCLAIMER

The information in this Policy Statement was based on the best scientific evidence

available at the time. It may be interpreted to reflect prevailing cultural sensitivities and socio-economic constraints.

REFERENCES

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