

A dental and oral imperative: World Oral Health Month

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Head Office, SADA

As on the thirteenth day of February this year, the population of South Africa was officially recorded as 57,814,097. Let us assume that each citizen has 15 teeth... a moderate estimate, but, accounting for children with deciduous dentition, for adults who are already edentulous, that may be a fair guess.

That assumption translates into just on 870 million teeth being used on a daily basis in South Africa. We have some 6500 dentists registered with the HPCSA... and, again an assumption... say 500 are not actually in practice. A quick calculation, assuming all else is equal, ...results in the conclusion that each practising dentist has responsibility for some 145,000 teeth!

It is all very well to play with statistics, the harsh reality is that the fight against dental disease is not being won. A recent study showed that amongst children attending immunization clinics around Johannesburg, there was a 60% occurrence of caries.. and that 90% of the affected children had received no treatment.¹ If that is the case in an urban community alert enough to ensure immunization for their children, it may be assumed that much more dire statistics await us elsewhere in the country.

Oral diseases remain a major public health concern affecting 3.9 billion people.² Dental caries which is largely preventable **through proper self-care and regular dental check-ups**, together with managing risk factors, remains the most common oral disease, affecting 60-90% of school children and a vast majority of adults.³ It is about five times as common as asthma and seven times as common as hay fever.

On the horizon may be some positive opportunities... It is that exciting time of the year when oral health professionals give back to the communities that are under their care. Yes, it's time to celebrate World Oral Health Day (WOHD), which is on the 20th March.

WOHD is the largest global awareness campaign on oral health and an opportunity for the profession to raise awareness of the global burden of oral diseases, and to engage and work with stakeholders to reduce the overall oral disease burden.

Of course there is a most relevant factor which focusses our attention on March 20th, World Oral Health Day. It is embodied in **the most recent definition of Oral Health** which moves away from the normative, paternalist view of oral health, and places the patient at the centre of how they view oral health.

Therefore, we are in a partnership with our patients to ensure that they achieve and maintain optimal oral health. It is indeed clear that the primary responsibility for oral health care rests with every individual, every citizen, every patient.

Certainly, the Dental Profession should be seen to take a leading role in guiding the population to better oral health, but in the long run, the oft-quoted saying "Oral Disease is preventable" is the foundation on which should be built the desired enhancement of the oral health of the community. The opportunity to emphasise the critical importance of oral care is provided by the FDI (The World Dental Federation) who have seized a day when across the world, oral care will hold centre stage.

The South African Dental Association is a committed member of the world team, and will strive to secure the attention of all people to spend the time and energy to preserve their natural dentition.

The 2019 Theme is :

Say Ahh... Action on Mouth Health.

The WOHD theme '**Say Ahh**', started with **Think Mouth, Think Health** as the first sub-theme. It empowered people to keep a healthy mouth, helping them to maintain their general health and well-being. A healthy mouth and a healthy body go hand in hand. Maintaining a healthy mouth is crucial to keeping it functioning correctly and for maintaining overall health and quality of life.

The theme focuses on four main messages:

1. Oral health is much more than a nice smile.
2. Oral health and general health have a two-way relationship.
3. The mouth cannot be isolated from the rest of the body.
4. Oral health professionals play a key role in providing this information and guidance on how to prevent, manage and treat oral diseases and in making people understand the benefits to their general health and well-being.

South Africa intends to participate in the Day, and the Dental Association is planning a variety of activities.

Early announcement of the Day is a critical requirement and a Press Release has been prepared for circulation to all South African Newspapers:

WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY: 20 MARCH 2019

Say Ahh: Act on Mouth Health

Oral health is multi-faceted and includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence, and without pain, discomfort and disease of the craniofacial complex.⁴ Oral diseases, such as tooth decay and gum disease, are widespread and preventable. Through proper self-care and regular dental check-ups, together with managing risk factors, good oral health and general health can



be secured.

It's never too early or too late to start looking after your oral health. Just like other major diseases, prevention, early detection and treatment are key to ensuring the best outcomes and reducing the risk for oral diseases and associated health complications. People can 'Act on Mouth Health' by adopting good oral hygiene habits; eating a healthy diet, particularly one low in sugar; quitting tobacco use; and avoiding excessive alcohol consumption.

Oral diseases and tooth loss impact both children and adults - they should not be considered as unavoidable consequences of population ageing. Oral health professionals play a key role in providing information and guidance on how to prevent, manage and treat oral diseases and in making people understand the benefits to their general health and well-being.

World Oral Health Day (WOHD) is celebrated on 20 March each year and is the largest global awareness campaign on oral health and an opportunity for all stakeholders to Say Ahh: Act on Mouth Health and make a commitment to oral health. Safeguarding oral health can help ensure people have good quality of life into old age.

Prepared by: Dr Khanyi Makwakwa, FDI Liaison, South Africa

Other media exposure for the World Oral Health Day in South Africa involves:

- Full page advertisements in You and Drum Magazines.

- Full page advertisement in Mother & Child Magazine as well as the Editorial.
- Clicks Radio: Members of the Committee of the Young Dentists Council will be addressing Oral Health on the Clicks Radio station, every day from 18 - 21 March with a 30 minute slot.

Schools

- Each SADA Branch will nominate five schools to visit in partnership with Colgate. Oral Health packs will be delivered to Grade R to Grade 3 children. The intention is to reach 7500 children in SA.
- SADA Head Office staff are to visit 15 additional schools, also in partnership with Colgate.

Campaigns

- Sefako Makgatho University is actively involved in school visits with an ongoing outreach programme.
- All other Dental Schools are invited to be part of the Day and are encouraged to initiate outreach programmes.

Social Media

- Temporary Tattoos to be printed (SADA Logo and "Say Ahh") and handed out to Dental Students. Students will take Selfies and will circulate these with the WOHD slogan.

SADA Communiqué

- Printable WOHD posters and suggested activities on how to celebrate WOHD will be included in forthcoming Communiques.

Unilever will actively partner with SADA in projects currently undergoing planning.

We should encourage our patients and the communities in which they live that it is never too early or too late to start looking after oral health. Prevention, early detection and treatment are key to ensuring the best outcomes and reducing the risk for oral diseases and associated health complications. They should be enabled to '**Act on Mouth Health**' by adopting good oral hygiene habits; eating a healthy diet, particularly one low in sugar; quitting tobacco use; and avoiding excessive alcohol consumption.,.

The Association applauds all those supporting and participating in the programmes.

Challenge

How many of those 870 million teeth can be saved?

References

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