Athletes, compete in oral health!

Claudia Salwiczek

Two weeks ago, the 21st Winter Olympics ended with the passing on of the Olympic torch from Vancouver to Sochi in Russia. All the excitement and records aside, what remains are images of many athletes failing at their respective disciplines. Never before have the Games pushed the physical limits of what the human body can accomplish. Sadlly, one athlete from Georgia lost his life after leaving the track at high speed during the men’s luge competition.

One major issue overshadowed by these tragedies is oral health. It seems that athletes and officials alike are not paying much attention to this problem, maybe because a healthy mouth and teeth are not considered relevant to top performance. This assumption is certainly wrong. Pain resulting from tooth decay, root-canal infection or gum disease can trouble athletes to such an extent that they are not able to compete. In addition, UV radiation accumulated over a long time in sports like the biathlon or cross-country can significantly increase the risk of developing oral cancer.

The International Olympic Committee’s decision to screen more athletes for oral lesions this year is a step in the right direction and an acknowledgement that oral health forms part of general health. However, having these examinations every four years won’t change much in the general oral health behaviour of athletes. Dentists, physicians and training staff need to drive home to them that a little investment in their mouths will help to remain more healthy not only during their active career, but also later in life.

Let’s hope that the competition for better oral health will already have begun when the Olympic flame shines over Sochi in 2014.

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To the Editor

Re: Editorial “Digital technology does not make better dentists” (Dental Tribune Asia Pacific No. 1-2, Vol. 8, page 4)

It’s interesting that you don’t think technology will make better dentists. Things like digital radiography and carries detection give clinicians the opportunity to see and diagnose things more quickly than they could before. Three-dimensional cone-beam imaging integrated with Cerec technology allows a dentist to plan, design and deliver restored implants like never before. And let’s not forget that the word better is very subjective, especially from a patient’s perspective. I would assume that most patients would consider faster treatment and longer lasting restorations that can be delivered with technology better.

Joe McGonigal, USA, 24 Feb. 2010