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Dentists in Malaysia disagree with dental bill

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PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia: A new bill aimed at restructuring the practice of dentistry in Malaysia has been met with opposition by dental professionals nationwide.

In a recent interview with the tabloid newspaper The Malay Mail, the President of the Malaysian Private Dental Practitioners’ Association (MPDPA), Dr Malliga Vadivelos, said that the draft recently proposed by the country’s dental council does not make sufficient distinction between qualified dental surgeons and therapists.

The bill is also under scrutiny for making it too easy for foreign practitioners to obtain temporary licences to practise and preventing general practitioners from performing specialty treatments like orthodontics and dental implantology. The MPDPA and other dentist organisations called upon the council to put the bill up for further discussion, which they claim was drafted without sufficient input from the dental profession.

Proposed by the Malaysian Dental Council in October, the new bill is to replace the 1971 Dental Act.
Petition for dental scheme in Australia receives support

CANBERRA, Australia: New plans by the Labor government in Australia to shut down its Medicare dental scheme have encountered opposition among patients nationwide. In an online petition, thousands have signed to keep the scheme in place, the advocacy organisation GetUp! has reported.

Labor Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek recently put an end to the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme by signing a ministerial determination in August that will prevent new patients applying to the programme. She said that instead the government will provide AUS$1.3 billion for a new programme that will be implemented in 2014 and target children. Additional funding of AUS$1.5 billion will also be provided to state-run public dental clinics.

Patients who already have referrals to see a dentist from their GPs have until the end of next month to complete their treatment, according to the ministry.

The Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme allowed patients with chronic illnesses and complex care needs to claim benefits for dental treatment of up to AUS$4,250 (US$4,400). Controversy related to the scheme arose last year, when the government launched investigations into a number of dental practitioners who were alleged to have failed to comply with administrative requirements.

Dental experts have warned that ending the programme without an immediate replacement could add more patients in need of treatment to the already extensive waiting list in public hospitals. They claim that millions have benefited from the scheme since it was implemented by the Howard government in 2007.

According to the Labor government, expenses for the scheme have accumulated to such an extent that it is now costing ten times more than originally projected.

Faster voice recovery

SINGAPORE: Singaporean scientists have designed a new system to help patients who have undergone larynx removal to speak again in a single surgery. In comparison with existing methods, their invention not only reduces the number of surgical steps but also increases accuracy of placement of a voice prosthesis and allows for immediate voicing.

Conventionally, various surgical steps are involved in the insertion of a voice prosthesis. Doctors need to make a small puncture in the wall between the trachea and the oesophagus, while, at the same time, a guidewire is inserted into the fistula to prevent the creation of a false passage. Two dilators are then inserted to widen the fistula.

Previously, a temporary rubber tube was placed into the fistula and the voice prosthesis was inserted about two weeks later, explained the researchers. They think, however, that their newly developed technique can reduce the time needed to restore the patient’s ability to speak to ten minutes after the initial procedure. It offers a one-step solution, reducing the complexity of the surgery and saving patients discomfort and money, said Dr David Lau, the project’s consultant ENT surgeon at Raffles Hospital in Singapore.

“Until now, good sizing of the prosthesis was achieved through trial and error,” said Dr Chui Chee Kiong, project leader and assistant professor at the at the National University of Singapore’s Department of Medical Engineering. “We have merged all the steps into a single procedure. Our system ensures an immediate snug fit of the prosthesis in the passageway created between the trachea and the oesophagus.”

Owing to tissue change and wear, voice prostheses need to be changed, which entails fitting them each time. “Our invention offers patients a more fuss-free system, reducing time and discomfort,” added Chng Chin Boon, a research engineer at the university.

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