HK takes first step to regulate dental bleaching

HONG KONG: The government in Hong Kong has proposed new legislation that would make it illegal for beauticians to perform dental bleaching and other cosmetic procedures classified as high-risk medical procedures. In the new guidelines under the Medical Registration Ordinance, only officially registered dentists and physicians would be permitted to do so, representatives of the Food and Health Bureau announced.

In addition to tooth whitening, the legislation would apply to Botox injections, chemical exfoliation and hyperbaric oxygen therapy. It is expected to come into effect in a few months from now since it has been accepted by a Legislative Council panel.

Cosmetic procedures offered at beauty spas and salons have become a thriving business in China’s Special Administrative Region, which has raised concerns about the safety of risky procedures undertaken by non-professionals. Several incidences have occurred in the recent past, including the death of a 46-year-old woman who had undergone blood transfusion therapy at a 138 beauty centre in the Causeway Bay area last autumn. Since then, professional organisations like the Hong Kong Dental Association have repeatedly urged the government to address loopholes in current regulations that allow non-professionals to perform procedures that could potentially harm patients’ health or place their lives at risk.

“Dental bleaching is a chemical procedure that can cause irreversible damage to human teeth if handled improperly,” council member, Dr Alfred Yung, told the newspaper South China Morning Post earlier in July. “Intra-oral treatment and dental procedures like tooth bleaching provided by non-dental or non-clinical professionals therefore pose a threat to public health and should be banned.”

With the proposed guidelines, Hong Kong is following other countries in the region that revamped their tooth-whitening regulations. New Zealand, for example, recently restricted the counter sale of tooth-whitening products with a high concentration of hydrogen peroxide. Earlier this year, Australia also changed its poison standard to stop the sale of tooth-whitening products containing more than 6 per cent of the harmful chemical in retail stores and pharmacies.

SA affects women most

The impact of obstructive sleep apnea, a serious disorder characterised by repeated interruption of breathing during sleep, may be more severe in women than in men. Researchers in the US report that body responses, such as high blood pressure and sweating, are less pronounced in people with sleep apnea and in women in particular.

It’s all in your head

Japanese researchers have recently presented new research that could help to understand and manage dental phobia better. By investigating patients with help of functional magnetic resonance imaging, they found that brain activity in individuals with high anxiety levels significantly differs from those with less or no fear of the dentist.

Malament on tour in India

Ivoclar Vivadent has announced that Dr Kenneth Malament, a well-known prosthodontist from New York in the USA, will be holding a three-day lecture series on the integration of aesthetic dentistry into routine and complex prosthodontics in India this month.

In addition to the science and controversies involving modern dental materials, he will be discussing the concerns and factors for prosthodontists when working with patients who insist on aesthetic procedures, the dental material manufacturer said.

The lectures will take place from 28 to 28 November in the cities of Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai. Dentists interested in attending can register through the Ivoclar Vivadent India website.

Five thousand too few

Malaysia’s health minister, Datuk Seri Dr Subramaniam S/o K. V. Sathasivam, has recently admitted that his country will need to produce twice as many dentists as it currently has to achieve its target dentist-patient ratio of 1 to 5,000 by 2020. Although boasting slightly over 4,500 dentists, he said that Malaysia’s oral health-care workforce is largely inadequate to serve the country’s population of almost 30 million.

In order to address the shortage, his ministry will continue to collaborate with universities and dental schools nationwide to encourage more young people to pursue a career in dentistry. As a result, the intake of new dental students has already risen from 515 to 815 this year, Sathasivam said. He added that over 1,000 more students are expected to enrol for studies in dentistry next year.

The figures were presented at an oral health promotion event in the capital Kuala Lumpur in October.