Taiwan dentists more compliant with infection-control requirements

Taipei, Taiwan: Figures from two surveys conducted over a decade among general practitioners in Taiwan indicate that infection-control measures in dental practices have significantly improved. Of those surveyed in 2010, the majority of dentists reported wearing and regularly changing gloves when treating patients. Moreover, the survey found that all the respondents wore surgical masks.

Head caps or protective eye wear, however, was only worn by four in dentists.

Compliance with wearing protective gear was the highest among young female practitioners who treated more than 20 patients per day, according to the study. It also revealed that dentists were kept more up to date with developments in infection control in 2010 by using the Internet and through continuing education seminars than they were ten years ago.

According to the researchers from the Taipei Medical University and the National Taiwan University, the recent numbers are a significant improvement on the first survey conducted by the same team in 1999. Back then, 500 questionnaires were randomly sent to dentists who at this time were members of the Taiwan Dental Association.

While only 52% of dentists completed the questionnaire that year, more than 71% per cent (or 285 respondents) did so in the follow-up survey ten years later. To date, the island state has more than 11,000 registered dentists.

The researchers suggested that the improvement could possibly be traced back to the SARS epidemic in Asia in 2005, which saw Taiwan highly affected with a final death toll of 84 and concern raised by patients and the public nationwide about the risk of disease transmission in health care settings. Public funding and requiring dentists to attend continuing education courses on infection control have also contributed to the improvement in recent years, they said. They recommended conducting further studies and increasing continuing education opportunities in the subject nationwide.

“Although infection-control practices have improved over time in this Asian country, there is still much room for increasing compliance rates regarding wearing a head cap, protective eyewear and a face mask, and disinfecting impression equipment,” the researchers state in the report.

Since 2005, practitioners in Taiwan have been entitled to US$1 for infection-control measures from National Health Insurance for every patient they treat.