LONDON, UK: In celebration of World Oral Health Day, representatives of the FDI World Dental Federation presented the latest findings on oral health on 20 March at a press conference held in collaboration with the British Dental Association in London. The report identifies the main obstacles to achieving universal oral health and includes recommendations to improve oral health worldwide.

Among other aspects, the report, titled “Oral health worldwide: A report by FDI World Dental Federation”, highlights that nearly 100 per cent of adults and between 60 and 90 per cent of children worldwide have dental caries, which results in millions of lost school and work hours. For instance, in the US, an estimated 2.4 million days of work and 1.6 million days of school are missed owing to oral disease.

In the Philippines, toothache is the primary reason for school absenteeism. The FDI stated that about 97 per cent of Philippine 6-year-olds have dental caries.

In addition, the report states that only 60 per cent of the world’s population have access to oral care, creating enormous disparities between different populations. According to the FDI, people of a lower socio-economic status visit the dentist less often and have fewer fillings, more missing teeth, higher tooth decay and periodontal disease rates. The FDI identified that about 97 per cent of Philippine 6-year-olds have dental caries.

In order to increase access to oral care, the training of the oral health workforce needs to be strengthened and expanded to improve the quality of and increase the number of oral health professionals. Moreover, emphasis needs to be put on the equal geographical distribution of oral health personnel, especially within developing countries, where the dentist-to-population ratio is approximately 1:150,000 compared with about 1:2,000 in most industrialised countries.

The FDI further highlighted that a solely curative approach to tackling the burden of oral health is neither realistic nor sustainable. The organisation asserts that the prevention of oral diseases and promotion of oral health must be at the core of national policies and programmes. In this respect, global and national surveillance should be strengthened to identify risk factors and oral health needs as a basis for developing appropriate approaches and measures, the FDI stated.

The event also saw the launch of The Tooth Thief, an illustrated book for children that includes oral health tips. The book emphasises the importance of good oral health to children to instil good oral care habits from a young age.

The foreword was written by Yaya Toure, Manchester City Football Club player and three times African Footballer of the Year, who was this year’s World Oral Health Day ambassador.

The book is available from the Apple iBooks Store and Amazon, and can be downloaded from the World Oral Health Day website, www.worldoralhealthday.com. The complete white paper can be accessed free on the website as well.

NEW YORK, USA: Conventionally, periodontal disease is classified as either chronic or aggressive based on clinical signs and symptoms. However, this method lacks an unequivocal, pathobiology-based foundation. Researchers at Columbia University Medical Center have thus developed a new system for classifying periodontal disease based on the genetic signature of affected tissue.

In a study involving 120 male and female nonsmokers aged 11 to 78 with periodontitis, the researchers identified a molecular profiling of gingival tissue could form a basis for the development of an alternative classification for periodontitis, explained Dr Panos N. Papapanou, study author and professor of dental medicine at Columbia University in the City of New York.

Analysing genome expressions in the gingival tissue taken from the study participants, the researchers found that molecular profiling of gingival tissue could form a basis for the development of an alternative classification for periodontitis, explained Dr Panos N. Papapanou. According to the study, patients in the second cluster showed a more extensive form of the disease. They were mostly male, matching with the well-established observation that severe periodontitis is more common in men than in women.

The researchers believe that a new system based on genetic analysis could offer significant advantages for classifying patients.

“If a patient is found to be highly susceptible to severe periodontitis, we would be justified in using aggressive therapies, although this person may have subclinical disease,” Papapanou said. “Today, we basically don’t know whether a periodontal infection is truly aggressive until severe, irreversible damage has occurred,” he added.

In the near future, the researchers plan to conduct a prospective study to validate the new classification system’s ability to predict disease outcomes.

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