Medical-dental health links continue to build

By Fred Michmerhuizen, Online Editor

New evidence shows improvements in oral health can have a positive impact on reducing atherosclerosis, or plaque, in arteries.

The science behind why a diseased mouth puts one at a higher risk for numerous systemic diseases, such as heart attack, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease and some forms of cancer, continues to build.

As more dentists and physicians become aware of how this affects their patient’s general health and medical conditions, patient and public’s expectations of the role their dentist plays in health will likely shift.

“Almost a hundred years ago there were a few dentists and physicians who were very forward thinking who postulated that dental disease could actually impact general health,” said Dr. James McAnally, CEO of Big Case Marketing, a marketing and case acceptance consulting firm for dentists with advanced clinical training.

“Unfortunately, at that time, quackery in medicine and dentistry was being fought, and valid lines of questioning were rejected instead of explored, delaying the study of what relationships were present between the mouth and entire body.”

McAnally offered his remarks during an interview about the role of the dentist and heart health with Dr. Dean Vafiadis, a New York-based periodontist, on New York City Cosmos radio FM 91.5 WNYE.

“In our current environment, thanks to professional rigidity and failure to change the existing standards of care rapidly, regardless of the science, most dental schools and state dental licensing boards are artificially slowing the progress of advances in understanding of disease relationships from benefiting the general population’s health,” McAnally said.

Vafiadis, McAnally and many other dentists are on the forefront of putting the information needed in front of the lay public so they can be informed as to what they should be hearing from their local dentist.

“The recent report out of Case Western University where a study found the exact same strain of bacteria from a 55-year-old California woman’s infected gums in her still-born baby serves as a vivid example of a direct systemic infection resulting from an oral infection,” McAnally said.

“While that makes for good headlines, the headline that isn’t being put out there is the literal millions in the population who will suffer more whole body disease, worse whole body disease and a potentially shortened lifespan simply as a consequence of what their dentists aren’t talking to them about.”

As part of the interview, the Medical-Perio Referral Program, designed for general dentists, periodontists, oral surgeons and prosthodontists, which allows an easy facilitation of the physician-dentist relationship to improve patient health in both environments, was also discussed.

“This is really a two-way street that benefits every patient,” McAnally said. “If patients go to a dentist that is part of the referral program, they know they are under the care of someone who understands the links in health and how to do everything the current science shows is effective to help the patient become healthier and stay healthier.

“Furthermore,” he said, “by improving the referral relationship between the family practice physicians and cardiologists and the dentist, more medical patients with serious medical conditions are likely to receive appropriate dental treatment to reduce dental disease’s effects on their systemic health. Everyone wins. For some dentists, this referral model literally recreates the entire focus of a practice.”

Dentists or medical doctors interested in the Medical-Perio Referral Program can contact Big Case Marketing at info@BigCaseMarketing.com, call (206) 601-6754 or visit www.MedicalPerio.com.

Meanwhile, the jobs situation may also be starting to improve. The Labor Department reported Feb. 5 that the American unemployment rate dipped from 10 percent to 9.7 percent in January, causing some economists to speculate that the worst job market in at least 25 years may at last be getting better.

According to a recent report from Robert W. Baird & Co., a dental equipment rebound at the end of 2009 was continuing into January and the demand for dental consumables was picking up slightly.

“We continue to believe slow/ steady recovery in 2010 will lead to more normalized industrywide performance in 2011,” stated the report, titled “Dental Market Rebound Continues in January, 2010 Optimism Growing.”

The report offered several specific signs of optimism for the dental products sector, including the following:

Dental consumables demand is not just stable, but slightly improving, the report said, as volumes are flat to up slightly and 1 to 2 percent price increases are sticking.

For distributors, a modest rotation away from telesales and Internet distributors back to value-adds seems to be occurring, while manufacturers seem to be benefiting from modest restocking at distributors and dental offices.

At the recent Yankee Dental Congress in Boston, exhibit hall booth activity was “generally upbeat,” the report said.

“All in, we continue to believe 1 to 3 percent domestic dental consumables market growth in 2010 remains a reasonable assumption, with the upper end of that range possible if December/January trends persist throughout the year,” the report said.