

Oral Health for Healthy Ageing

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Context

Over the past decades, the ageing population has increased globally due to the implementation of effective public health policies to increase life expectancy and advances in science and healthcare. Currently, the prevalence of dental caries, periodontal diseases, tooth loss, dry mouth and oral cancer remains very high worldwide, especially in the elderly population. These oral conditions are associated with impaired chewing function, inadequate nutritional intake, deteriorating quality of life, and even death. Poor oral health can limit an individual's ability to function and interact socially, and an increased oral inflammatory burden can result in increased severity of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dementia. A decline in oral function affects how long one can expect to remain healthy, as he or she gets older, and it can therefore place considerable pressure on public resources.

Scope

This policy statement covers key topics on oral healthcare necessary to maintain healthy ageing that should be considered by national authorities, national dental associations (NDAs) and dental care providers for the promotion of oral health to cope with the impact of an ageing global population.

Definitions

Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, social activity and security, in order to enhance quality of life as people age; allowing people to realize their potential for physical, social and mental wellbeing throughout the life course.

Principles

Attention to oral healthcare has been shown not only to promote maintenance of a natural, healthy, and functional dentition, but also contributes to survival in older adults. Maintaining optimal oral health reduces the risk of suffering from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and promotes healthy ageing.

Policy

Access to adequate oral healthcare is important in all stages of life, especially in ageing populations, to attain healthy ageing and improve quality of life. Oral health care providers are vital in the prevention of oral diseases and tooth loss to reduce the risk for NCDs, through engaging practices to control or reducing common risk factors. FDI supports a multidisciplinary approach based on oral health promotion and education to improve quality of life and reduce oral health disparities among the ageing population. FDI recommends that:

- NDAs, dental care providers, and government authorities should jointly promote oral health, since a healthy and functional dentition is a fundamental part of general health and wellbeing.
- Healthcare providers should prepare for an increased need of oral health services for dentate older adults, including preventive and restorative services through the individual's life course, as complete tooth loss among older adults is declining.
- NDAs and national agencies should monitor and periodically report oral health measures and related health factors, using standardized epidemiological surveillance, and support public health policies for healthy ageing to promote optimal general and oral health.
- Government authorities, NDAs and academic institutions should further support and commit scientific research on the interrelation of NCDs with oral diseases and their impact on general health, wellbeing and quality of life to optimize the prospect of healthy ageing for all.
- NDAs and academic institutions must provide training and education to the dental workforce, at all levels, to meet the increasing needs of the elderly, understanding that age-associated changes in systemic health and medication use can impact oral health and function.

References

1. World Health Organization. Active Ageing: A Policy Framework. Geneva: WHO, 2002.
2. World Congress 2015. Tokyo Declaration on Dental Care and Oral Health for Healthy Longevity. Tokyo: JDA, 2015.