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Dentist shortage to worsen

By DTI

HONG KONG/SINGAPORE: Owing to their growing and ageing populations, Hong Kong and Singapore are at risk of a serious lack of dentists in the years to come, experts have warned. Both are not equipped to meet the changing needs and demands of an increasingly older population with the current numbers of locally trained dentists.

According to a Hong Kong government report due to be released in the next several months, most of the city’s medical professions—including dentistry—will face shortages in the next ten years, the South China Morning Post has reported. Proposing solutions for the predicament, the report’s commission recommends increasing the number of overseas-qualified health staff working in public hospitals under limited registrations, among other measures.

To date, public hospitals in Hong Kong have been allowed to recruit foreign doctors under a registration scheme that is limited to one year. However, owing to stringent conditions that restrict foreigners from working in the private sector, only 12 medical professionals joined via the scheme last year, according to the Post. In order to address the predicted shortage of health care workers, these numbers would have to at least triple and contract terms be extended to attract more doctors, the report’s experts cautioned.

In Singapore, this situation is presently a lived reality in the dental profession. Here, foreign-trained dentists already made up the majority of new dentists registered in recent years. For example, in 2014, only 46 of the 187 newly registered dentists were local graduates, the Straits Times stated in an article.

Fighting implant infections

A team of researchers at KU Leuven in Belgium has developed a dental implant that gradually releases antimicrobial drugs to stop a biofilm forming on the surface and thereby help prevent infections. “Our implant has a built-in reservoir under the crown of the tooth,” explained lead author Dr Kaat De Cremer.

“A cover screw makes it easy to fill this reservoir with antimicrobial drugs. The implant is made of a porous composite material, so that the drugs gradually diffuse from the reservoir to the outside of the implant, which is in direct contact with the bone cells.” So far, the implant has only been tested in the laboratory.

Regionally connected

Through analysis of the teeth of two 7,700-year-old hunter-gatherer women discovered in a Russian cave, UK researchers found that their genetic make-up closely resembled that of modern-day populations in the region. This indicates that certain ethnic groups across north-east Asia have migrated very little for around eight millennia.