Experts quarrel over mouthwash study in Australian dental journal pushes oral cancer debate

Dr Michael Miller talks with DTI

Daniel Zimmermann

LEIPZIG, Germany: New evidence from Australia has revealed that the long-term use of mouthwash containing alcohol can lead to an increased risk of developing oral cancer. The information, which was released after a scientific review was published in the Australian Dental Journal, reports on evidence that ethanolic allows carcinogenic substances, such as nicotine, to permeate the lining of the mouth. Top-selling mouthwashes contain as much as 26 per cent alcohol, which is used to kill the bacteria responsible for tooth decay. It is also necessary as a solvent for different flavour oils.

Michael McCullough, Associate Professor of Oral Medicine at the University of Melbourne in Australia, who led the study said: “We see people with oral cancer who have no other risk factors than the use of mouthwash containing alcohol, so what we’ve done is review all the evidence. Since the article, further evidence has come out, too.”

“We believe there should be warnings. It was a facial cream that had the effect of reducing acne but had a four- to five-fold increased risk of skin cancer, no one would be recommending it,” he added.

The Australian government said although the study was “very interesting”, it lacked definite proof that these products would increase the risk of cancer. Ministry of Health dental officer, Robin Wymman, recommended people speak to their dentists when using mouthwash long term. In a written statement sent to Dental Tribune in January, Johnson & Johnson rejected the claims: “Leading cancer scientists, as well as the US Food and Drug Administration and researchers in dentistry, have found no evidence that alcohol-containing mouthwashes, if used properly, lead to increased risk of developing oral cancer.” The company, which is behind the Listerine brand, holds 25 per cent of the global mouthwash market and claims to have conducted more than 100 scientific evaluations of its top-selling brand.

Amalgam fillings banned in Sweden

The Swedish Government has announced the introduction of a blanket ban on mercury in the country that will be effective from 1 June 2009. The ban will mean that amalgam fillings and other products containing mercury will not be allowed on the Swedish market, and alternative techniques will have to be used in dental care, chemical analysis, and the chloralkali industry, the country’s Ministry of the Environment has announced in a press release. It also said that the Swedish Chemicals Agency is authorised to grant exemptions in individual cases.

In connection with the Government’s decision, waste containing mercury is to be disposed of in deep geological repositories, such as salt mines, in other EU countries.

New health college for Malaysia

Indian’s leading education group, Vinayaka Missions University, has announced the opening of a new US$5 million health college in Butterworth in Malaysia. The facility, which can accommodate 3,000 students, is intended to provide education opportunities for students from rural areas.

Australia honours two dentists

Dr Patrick Joseph Henry from Perth and dental hygienist Susan Mary Aldenhoven, Immediate Past President of the International Federation of Dental Hygienists, have been honoured with the Member of the Order of Australia for their services to dentistry.

Singapore to host next meeting of the CDA

The Commonwealth Dental Association (CDA) has announced that its next Triennial Meeting will be held in Singapore on 5 September 2009, on the fringe of the FDI Annual World Dental Congress. Details of the event and requests for the nomination of officials will be circulated via e-mail to national dental associations early in 2009, General Administrator Ulrike Mathes said.

The UK-based CDA represents national dental societies in various Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Singapore. According to the association’s latest figures, there are 164,000 registered dentists within the Commonwealth of Nations.