Asia News

Philippines include dental fees in senior tax exemption

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI
HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Philippine citizens above 60 years of age will soon have access to cheaper dental and medical services. A new law recently passed by Congress entitles seniors to exemption from the value-added tax of 20 per cent on goods and services, including dental fees. The law, known as the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010, will also provide seniors with free medical and dental services in all government hospitals, medical facilities and out-patient clinics.

According to the latest government statistics, there are approx. 6 million people over the age of 60 living in the Philippines. Numerous organisations for the elderly have rallied heavily in the past few months in press President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to promulgate the law.

However, the Act could mean a significant reduction in income for dental health-care workers, as more than 85 per cent of dentists are currently in private practice. Finance officials said that enforcing the Act could lead to annual revenue losses of between US$88.5 and US$22 million in all private sectors in years to come.

Dental fees in the Philippines range from US$50 for a tooth-coloured filling to more than US$400 for crowns and bridges.

Beijing dentists raise alarm over poor oral hygiene practices

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI
HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Dentists from the Beijing Stomatology Hospital have released new figures that indicate poor oral hygiene practices in more than 50 per cent of adults. According to the survey by the Hospital’s Oral Disease Prevention Department, less than half of middle-aged residents in the Chinese capital clean their teeth even twice a week and no more than 1 per cent of people use dental floss.

The figures apply to the rest of the country, in which even more people are often reluctant to maintain an oral hygiene practice. A 2007 study by the World Health Organization has shown that in some parts of the country, only one in four adults brush their teeth or pay regular visits to their dentist.

“People do know the importance of oral health, but less than 15 per cent went to the Department of Stomatology last year. Less than 1 per cent have had regular oral exams,” said the hospital director, Yongcheng, Director of the Oral Disease Prevention Department.

“Most people only went to the clinics for toothaches.”

He added that according to the survey, more than 60 per cent of the patients observed have dental caries and 80 per cent suffer from gingivitis.

The Beijing municipal government has already invested US$2 million in caries prevention programmes but admitted they need to do more to improve the oral health status of the city’s citizens. An oral disease prevention programme was set up last year that aims to popularise health information, such as correct tooth-brushing, and advocate healthy food, tobacco control and exercise.

They aim for more than 90 per cent of residents to brush their teeth twice a day by 2014.

Philippine seniors receive exemption from taxation. (DTIFoto Suwirunjai)

International Imprint

Licensing by Dental Tribune International

Publisher Torsten Oemus

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**Human bite holds up to primates**

Claudia Salwinek

**HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany:** Modern humans are able to achieve higher bite forces than previously thought, a study from Australia has revealed. In the first comparison of its kind, researchers from the University of New South Wales' School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences in Sydney found that the slenderly built human skull has a far more efficient bite than that of other chimp, gorilla or orangutan, or that of two prehistoric members of the hominid family, Australopithecus africanus and Paranthropus boisei.

The result calls into question previous suggestions that the evolution of a less robust skull in modern humans involved a trade-off for a weaker bite or was necessarily a response to behavioural changes, such as switching to softer foods or increased processing of foods through tools and cooking. It has also been suggested that human jaw muscles were reduced to make way for a larger brain.

According to the researchers, who used sophisticated 3D finite element analysis to compare digital models of actual skulls, the results might also explain the apparent inconsistency of very thick tooth enamel in modern humans, a feature typically associated with high bite forces in other species.

**India quarrels over dental schools**

Daniel Zimmermann

**HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany:** A technical committee has been set up by the Indian Ministry of Health to investigate the decision by the Dental Council of India (DCI) to refuse giving new dental colleges permission to start undergraduate courses this year. The application of over 40 new dental colleges, most of them private, were rejected by the DCI last month, according to a report in the newspaper *Times of India*. In addition, the registration of 42 already existing schools has not been renewed.

Dental education in India has grown significantly in recent years and the country now ranks first in the world in having the highest number of dental schools. Last year, the Ministry of Health gave approval to a record number of new colleges which has raised concern for the future employment of dental graduates. Currently, the country has at least 280 dental institutions, that produce between 15,000 and 20,000 Bachelor of Dental Surgery graduates every year.

The DCI, which was set up to observe and maintain educational standards in dentistry, has justified its decision to disapprove applications due to claims for most colleges lacking enough faculty or clinical matter to teach students on. They also said that India does not require new dental schools. “There is hardly any employment opportunity for dentists in India,” DCI chief Dr Anul Kohli told the *Times of India*. “We must not open new dental colleges anymore but accredit the old ones under three categories — doing well, can improve and bad. Colleges under the last category should be shut down.”

Dr Kohli added that the last date for considering an application for approval was 15 July which would give colleges time to implement changes and get a clearance.