Economic fears in the US affect dental care
Visiting a dentist of low priority for many people, new study says

Daniel Zimmermann

LEIPZIG/WASHINGTON D.C.: With the economy in the United States declining, preventive dental care can be one of the first things to go. The correlation between rising unemployment and a drop in preventive dental care, however, is not necessarily due to people being short of cash, according to a new study appearing in the online edition of Health Services Research.

The researchers analysed 10 years of information about visits to dentists’ offices in metropolitan Seattle and Spokane from Washington Dental Services, the largest dental insurer in the US state, which covers roughly one-third of its residents. They compared this information to unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Washington’s Employment Security Department, and ruled out other possible explanations for a correlation.

In the Seattle area, for every 10,000 people who lost their jobs, there was a 1.2 per cent decrease in visits to dentists for checkups. The drop was higher in the Spokane area, where the same increase in unemployment was associated with a 5.95 per cent decrease in preventive visits. This is notable as the study looked at some form of parodontitis.

“We see that high community-level unemployment exacts a psychological toll on individuals,” said lead study author Brian Quinn. “Even for people who are working, or who have a working partner or spouse, there might be an impact if they’re stressed about themselves or their significant others losing their job.”

Quinn, a program officer for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said the distraction of worrying about not having a job could make dental care drop off a person’s radar. “During stressful periods, those things that don’t seem as urgent may be ignored,” he said.

Quinn added that because preventive care is usually cheaper than tooth repairs, dental plan administrators and public health policy makers might want to promote cleaning and check-ups during periods of high unemployment.

Miswaks level toothpaste

LEIPZIG: Dentists at the King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, have found that chewing cleaning sticks or miswaks are as beneficial for oral health as toothpaste. The research identified a total of 19 substances that kill harmful microorganisms and protect gums.

Infertility by gum disease

LEIPZIG: Infertile men are more likely to suffer from chronic gum infections than those with healthy sperm. After studying 56 men who came to a fertility lab for sperm analysis, Israeli researchers found that more than 80 per cent had some form of parodontitis.

Tokyo court turns down technicians lawsuit

Sakaya Ikeda

TOKYO: A claim by a group of 84 dental technicians to ban overseas dentures, mostly made in China, from being imported into Japan was recently dismissed by the Tokyo District Court. The lawsuit was filed by beginning of September 2011 will not include dental amalgam, a spokesperson of the European Commission has told Dental Tribune. The ban was announced by the commission by end of September in order to reduce health risks. The new rules will also oblige all mercury already in Europe to be “safely stored” so as not to cause a hazard.

Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans and high doses can be fatal. Although the use of mercury is declining worldwide, it is still used in small-scale gold mining, the chloralkali industry and production of vinyl-chloride monomer, the basis of PVC plastic. The EU ended all mercury extraction in 2001 but remains the world’s biggest exporter, supplying around a quarter of global consumption of mercury.

EU bans mercury exports, not amalgam

Anke Schiemann

LEIPZIG: An export ban on mercury in the European Union from 2011 will not include dental amalgam, a spokesperson of the European Commission has told Dental Tribune. The ban was announced by the commission by end of September in order to reduce health risks. The new rules will also oblige all mercury already in Europe to be “safely stored” so as not to cause a hazard.

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New health crisis in developing countries

Reuters

BANGALORE, India: A lack of skilled personnel has health systems in developing countries “on the brink of collapse,” said Ezekiel Nukuro, an Asia adviser for the World Health Organization. “In some countries, deaths from preventable diseases are rising and life expectancy is dropping,” he said. Some specialists claim the health crisis in such countries is being exacerbated by Western countries relaxing restrictive immigration regulations to attract doctors and nurses, to the West’s flagging health systems while saving money on expensive training.

But this “brain drain” leaves gaping holes in the healthcare systems of countries where children die daily from diarrhoea and where diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria run rampant. Aid agencies have warned that a “blue card” plan in the European Union to attract highly skilled migrants like hospital workers, which gained initial support, is at risk of being abandoned.

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In Afghanistan, the lack of public hospitals cannot afford disinfectant or rubber gloves, and doctors and nurses do not earn enough to feed their families, purchase medicines or make the drain worse. Africa, which has a quarter of the world’s disbelieving doctors, is affected the most. Across the continent, 17% of AIDs patients are often left unattended for days in rudimentary clinics staffed by a single overworked nurse and a few untrained orderlies. Doctors often visit only once every few weeks.

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At a FDI/SDA lunch in Stockholm, Photo: Peter Nerdell.

Teo Choo Aun, LOC Chairman of the Singapore congress, addresses the audience at a FDI/SDA lunch in Stockholm. Photo: Peter Nerdell.

The bid of the Singapore Dental Association to hold the congress in 2009 was publicly announced at the Opening Cer- emony of the International Dental Exhibition and Meeting in Singapore in 2006 and it was ac- cepted half a year later. 2009 will not be the first time for the FDI to hold its congress in the Asian tiger state. The last one was organised in 1990 and at- tempted to be successful by offering all delegates from all over South East Asia. In addition to the upcom- ing congress, the FDI is also in- volved in the organisation of the IDEM scientific programme. IDEM is one of the largest den- tal events in Singapore and the Asia Pacific region.

Singapore benefits from a strong tradition in dentistry, its dental school, the first in the Far East set up by the British Gov- ernment in 1929, offers training programmes at undergraduate and post-graduate levels and is well regarded by many major international examination bod- ies. In addition, a significant number of dentists practicing in Singapore have received post- graduate training from interna- tional institutions in the USA, UK and Australia. Singapore is also seeing more and more overseas patients, mainly be- cause of the repat’s return and gained for its high standard of treatment.

Reduced registration rates for the FDI congress are offered to those who either register and submit payment by the early bird deadline of 15 May 2009 or before the pre-registration deadline of 25 July 2009. After which, those who wish to attend the congress will have to regis- ter on-site in Singapore at the full-congress rates.

Teo Choo Aun, LOC Chairman of the Singapore congress, addresses the audience at a FDI/SDA lunch in Stockholm. Photo: Peter Nerdell.