Gates urges rich countries not to cut health aid

Reuters

NEW DELHI, India: Microsoft founder Bill Gates is worried the global financial crisis could last two to three years, and might drive rich countries to cut back on spending on health aid for the developing world. Echoing comments made last week by UN chief Ban Ki-Moon, the billion-naire philanthropist said the world’s poorest people will suffer the most during the economic slowdown and “strong voice” was needed to keep them a global priority.

“We certainly are concerned that one of the rich world governments could either reduce their increase or even cut back the amount they spend on these issues,” Gates said in India’s capital. “We have to admit that getting that generosity gets even more challenging when there’s tough economic times.”

Gates said he expected the United States to undergo a period of “economic contraction” for two to three years, as a result of a meltdown in the housing market and heavy consumer debt. Gates was optimistic about the newly elected American president Barack Obama’s efforts to tackle global health issues, saying Obama has “shown a lot of interest” and would “drive improvements in those areas.”

Gates was on a visit to India on behalf of his charitable foundation to tackle health issues, focusing on polio eradication and fighting HIV/AIDS. Meeting with Indian health officials and polio experts, Gates said he was confident polio could be successfully eradicated, with India leading the way. Gates called for increased government spending on health and urged Indian health officials to consider using innovative approaches, such as injection vaccines, to tackle creeping disease. While a lot more expensive and trickier to administer, the injected IPV vaccine could be used in addition to oral vaccines to stop the spread of polio in high-risk areas.

Oral vaccines have not proven to be as effective in India as elsewhere, a problem which some researchers suspect is down to poor sanitation and a higher presence of other diseases that stop the vaccine working properly.

A world effort to beat polio has succeeded in slashing the number of cases by 99 per cent over the past two decades, but the disease is still endemic in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has contributed more than US$17 billion in grants since it began in 1994, and has given hundreds of millions of dollars in a global campaign to eradicate polio.

The Philippines aims for the improvement of oral health in schoolchildren

LEIPZIG, Germany: The Filipino government has recently launched a new program to promote better oral health in the country’s public schools. The initiative is part of the Arroyo Administration’s Health Education Reform Order that aims to integrate preventive health measures in the education curriculum. It will be supported by companies, such as Colgate-Palmolive, which has agreed to donate more than P70 million ($US1.4 million) worth of toothpaste, toothbrushes, and oral health education materials to first grade students.

The Philippines is one of the Third World countries with the most alarming child dental problems. According to the Department of Education’s recent National Oral Health Survey of six- and twelve-year-old public schoolchildren, over 95 per cent of first-graders and nearly 80 per cent of sixth grade students in public schools suffer from tooth decay. The Department’s Health and Nutrition Center has blamed the problem on poor eating habits and a lack of proper oral care education.

“The survey results illustrate how little regard we give to oral hygiene,” Education Secretary Jesli A. Lapus told the newspaper the Philippine Daily Inquirer. “The problem of tooth decay is severely affecting our pupils’ performance in school. They cannot focus on learning.”

“Intensive education is one sure way of addressing common problems in oral health,” he added.

Lapus also appealed to the country’s dental professionals to support the programme. Noting that Filipinos only visited a dentist as a last resort, he said, “As dental professionals, you can change that perception.” He described the programme as a “creative way to encourage student participation in a worthy project that addresses two important concerns of our time—oral health and environmental protection.”

Study claims Australia low on dental workers

BRUCE, Australia: Australia will be facing a shortfall of dental workers, a new report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) states. Although the number of graduates from dental schools is expected to double in the next six years, the country will still be facing a shortfall of dental professionals will be needed to serve the expected number of visits in 2020. Previous studies have predicted a shortfall of 1,500 by 2010.

Commenting on the lack of workers, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) said that the ageing population will put pressure on both public and private dental operators. Baby boomers grew up before the education programmes that saw an increase in dental health, and more tooth problems are expected to develop as they get older.

ADA president Dr John Matthews told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation while the expansion of regional training centres has been a good thing, the Government must not be complacent. “Dentistry is a very highly sought after course, it’s a very good course,” he said. “Mostly the people who get the second-highest [university entrance] scores tend to do dentistry so there’s no shortage of people wanting to study dentistry.”

Dr Matthews also warned if dental services were to come under Medicare, the resultant demand would probably be too great for the public sector’s current resources. In March the Government announced it would take high-cost dental services out of the scope of Medicare, but this move was blocked in September by the Coalition in Australia.
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New health information system in the UAE

As an online information network will connect health facilities in Dubai (picture) and other Emirates until 2013. Photo: Naseba.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—Wareed, the new health information system for the United Arab Emirates, hospitals and clinics in the country will be connected via an online network by 2013 to improve medical care and ensure patient safety, a Ministry of Health official told Dental Tribune in November.

The network aims to exchange and access to medical and health information between patients and doctors as well as healthcare peers across the country. Patients can be treated in the most effective way by having access to their treatment results, updates and follow ups. They can also easily be transferred from one hospital to another within the UAE, even outside of the country thanks to specific agreements between the hospitals. The new system promises to avoid losing data, saving time and money, decreasing the waiting time for medical appointments but most importantly as the ability to provide international medical second opinion.

Although Wareed has a lot of advantages, it has some drawbacks. The main concerns are how to run the system in most efficient way and ensure patient safety while going through the process of implementing the customer centric data system. At the 3rd annual Healthcare Expansion Congress Mid-East, organised by Naseba, e-health application in the region, the importance of information at the point of care, patient safety and cancer management were the hottest issues discussed.

Patient safety is and should continue to be the most important consideration for delivering patient care while implementing the new system. A certain element of risk from human errors always remains but we should certainly be able to address avoidable and often costly mistakes, noted Raj Singh, healthcare solutions consultant EMEA, Hitachi Data Systems. "The reliability of IT health information systems coupled with advances in technologies such as RFID and Finger Vein Biometrics can help improve patient safety quite significantly. The most important consideration for improving patient safety still relies, however, on the healthcare providers who need to ensure they build out the best care practices with correct patient identification throughout their healthcare workflows and processes," he added.

Saudi Arabia is the first country in the Middle East region, to have implemented the eICU programme, patented by VISICU, which combines early warning software and remote monitoring to connect off-site critical care physicians and nurses to ICU patients at all times. The eICU Program provides an alternative way to deliver high-quality critical care when specialist resources are limited. The eICU vision is to have centralised intensivist physicians & critical care nurses—round-the-clock in an eICU Center—to help bedside teams watch over their sickest patients and to prioritise and guide interventions.

The evidence is growing that eICU Programs are having a proven impact on saving lives, reducing complications as well as the length of patient stays, especially in the countries where people have limited and unequal resources in healthcare services.

Mohammed Abd Al Ahi, the head of Radiology from the King Khalid University Hospital, commented: "The eICU programme is having a proven impact on saving lives, reducing complications as well as the length of patient stays, especially in the countries where people have limited and unequal resources in healthcare services.

"Intervention for the patients reviewed in this study included varied types of surgery, dental rehabilitation, psychological assessment and support, and speech assessment and therapy," the authors said. The variety of interventions indicates that the problems of adults with cleft lip and/or palate may be changing, according to the authors.

"Our study supports the need for a specialist multidisciplinary cleft clinic to provide continuing care for patients who have a history of cleft lip and/or palate," they added.
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Men drive cosmetic trends in the UK

According to Dr James Goodnik, dentist and BACD board member, “These results show that men have become more accepting of cosmetic treatments in general—reflecting the importance we now place on a healthy smile. The advent of new procedures, such as the removable adult braces and more realistic-looking veneers, which require much less drilling, also means people are less likely to choose invasive and irreversible treatments.”

Bridges are another procedure that has become more popular with men, who used to account for 42 per cent and now are edging ever closer to women at 46 per cent. Overall, orthodontics (which includes both visible ‘train track’ as well as invisible and removable braces) has boomed in popularity, with the number of cases more than tripling since 2006.

Women are still the big spenders on cosmetic dentistry, accounting for 61 per cent of all procedures. Women also still account for the majority of whitening procedures.

The top five procedures for men in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White fillings (back teeth)</td>
<td>12,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowns—Inlays—Onlays</td>
<td>5,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veneers</td>
<td>4,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White fillings (front teeth)</td>
<td>11,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitening</td>
<td>1,764</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry

Stem cells from monkey teeth stimulate growth of brain cells

ATLANTA, GA, USA: Researchers at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, Emory University, USA, have discovered dental pulp stem cells can stimulate growth and generation of several types of neural cells. Findings from this study suggest dental pulp stem cells show promise for use in cell therapy and regenerative medicine, particularly therapies associated with the central nervous system.

Dental stem cells are part of adult stem cells, one of the two major divisions of stem cell research. Adult stem cells have the ability to form many different types of cells, promising great therapeutic potential, especially for diseases such as Huntington's and Parkinson's diseases. Already, dental pulp stem cells have been used for regeneration of dental and craniofacial cells.

Dr David Bloom, dentist and president of the BACD, added, “This audit has highlighted some very exciting trends, such as an impressive increase in the number of orthodontic cases. This could well be a backlash against the dramatic smile ‘overhauls’ popularised in makeover shows but may also herald a more subtle, and indeed cost-effective, approach to cosmetic dentistry by the industry as a whole. It’s also interesting to note the overwhelming preference for less invasive treatments, such as onlays, which are porcelain fillings to cover part of the tooth, over crowns, which involve drilling to achieve full coverage.”

Oral bacteria bring in the taste

Scientists in Switzerland have reported that bacteria in the human mouth play a role in creating the distinctive flavours of certain foods. They have found that these bacteria actually produce odours from odourless components of food, allowing people to savour fruits and vegetables fully.

In the study, published in the recent issue of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, author Christian Starkenmann and colleagues have argued that some fruits and vegetables release characteristic odours only after being swallowed. In order to prove this, sensory tests were performed on 50 panelists, to evaluate the odour intensity of odourless sulphur compounds and the volatile sulphur compounds—known as thiols—that are released from the odourless compounds, which are found naturally in grapes, onions, and bell peppers. Participants instantly perceived the aroma of the thiols, but took 20 to 30 seconds to perceive the scent of the odourless sulphur compounds.

While scientists have previously reported that volatile compounds produced from precursor odourless compounds found in certain foods are responsible for this ‘retroaromatic’ effect, the details of this transformation were not fully understood. The authors conclude that it is the mouth bacteria’s ability to free thiols that helps modulate long-lasting flavours.