Australia to evaluate implementation of rapid oral HIV tests in dental practices

Daniel Zimmermann
DT Asia Pacific

SYDNEY, Australia: HIV infections in Australia jumped by 10 per cent last year, according to recently published figures from the University of New South Wales in Sydney. A group of researchers are investigating whether dental practices and pharmacies could help stop further spread of the virus by diagnosing more people who are infected and not aware of it through rapid oral HIV testing.

The trial, conducted in collaboration with the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Dentistry, Western Sydney Sexual Health, and Sydney School of Public Health, is currently being conducted in the states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. It seeks to examine knowledge of HIV, attitudes towards people living with HIV and the willingness of Australian dentists to conduct rapid HIV testing, lead researcher Dr. Anthony Santella told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific.

He said that studies on the willingness of dental patients to accept such testing were being done recently. Depending on the test results, the team will also investigate how to implement them in practices that operate in neighbouring areas with high HIV prevalence rates in cities like Sydney. This step is anticipated for next year.

“The evaluations would also need to be done to explore whether it is cost-effective to implement rapid HIV testing in dental practices that operate in neighbouring areas and whether other dental professionals could bulk bill the government for the test.”

Rapid HIV tests have been available to medical practitioners in Australia since late 2012, but the country has been slow to implement them. The OraQuick ADVANCE Rapid HIV-1/2 Antibody Test developed by US company OraSure Technologies and used in the trial has not yet received approval from the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration. It has been available to dental practitioners in the USA since early last year, when it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The latest studies suggest that rapid HIV testing in dental practices could increase testing frequency among regular testers, as well as testing rates.

According to the Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales, about 25 per cent of all HIV cases in Australia are undiagnosed. In total, more than 51,000 infections were reported in 2011, with almost every second one occurring in the state of New South Wales.
Women who have given birth to a number of children are more prone to dental diseases and tooth loss, new research from Japan implies. In a nationwide study conducted by the Tokyo Medical and Dental University and the National Cancer Center, it is suggested that the more children a woman has had during her life, the more likely it is that she has fewer functional teeth.

In the study, female participants were compared with male participants, among whom no relation between their number of teeth and number of children was found. The researchers therefore suggested that there might be a number of pathophysiological and socio-behavioural factors that may promote tooth loss among high-parity women. In order to address this, greater effort regarding the information made available and management of a woman’s dental health during pregnancy is essential, they recommended. The study, supported by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, was conducted between 2005 and 2006, and involved more than 1,500 women and men recruited from two national dental surveys done in 1990 and 2005. Women who had given birth to two children constituted the largest group. Every fourth woman in the study had given birth to three children, and one in thirty women had given birth to four children. Similar figures regarding number of children were reported for the men in the study.

Motivations of dental students differ widely

Against this backdrop, dental researchers from universities in China and Japan have gained new insight into the motivations of young people studying dentistry in both Asian countries. Among other findings, the study revealed that Chinese students appear to have chosen the profession primarily for its financial benefits and gain of personal prestige, while their fellow students in Japan reported that they had chosen the field to help people and out of personal interest.

According to the paper, money or social status was the decisive factor for enrolling in a dental school for almost every third dental student in China. Only one in five said that they had a higher motivation for studying dentistry. One in three admitted that they had chosen dentistry for no particular reason.

In Japan, however, more students appear to have actively chosen a career in dentistry. Family was also found to be a major motivation, which indicates that a significant number of dental students in the country are from a dentistry background and plan to continue their parents’ family business after they have graduated.

With regard to career choices, more than half of all dental students in Japan want to become a general dentist. This differs significantly from the Chinese students, who want to specialise or pursue a master’s degree. The researchers said that this could be because the income of general dentists is very low in the country even though there are too few dentists to treat its population of one billion adequately. They suggested that the country will need to reform its dental education system to address this gap by attracting students through better incentives.

The participants in the study, published in the latest issue of the International Dental Journal, were fifth- and sixth-year dental students from dental schools in Shenyang in China and Fukuoka in Japan.