NZ opposition says it’s time for universal dental care

Labor party welcomes Progressive proposal on free dental services

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG: The Progressive Party in New Zealand has introduced a new dental health policy paper that aims to extend free dental health care from youngsters to all people in the country. The paper proposes a reduction of tax cuts and a new levy on soft drinks to raise the estimated additional costs of more than NZ$500 million (US$407 million) for the scheme.

Other recommendations include shifting authority for water fluoridation from local to central government, as well as extending the voluntary bonding scheme to dental professionals in the country’s neglected rural areas.

According to the last national Oral Health Survey conducted in 2009, almost half the adults in New Zealand do not visit a dentist owing to cost. It also found that the majority of people only seek dental care when they have a dental problem rather than attending for regular check-ups. The country currently provides free dental care to those under 18 years of age. Treatment of adults however is not subsidised.

Progressive leader and former Deputy Prime Minister Jim Anderton said that free access to dental services should first be extended to vulnerable groups like pregnant women and the elderly, followed by those aged between 18 and 28, then 28 and 50, and members of the baby-boomer generation.

“This plan could be implemented over a period of five to ten years so that funding administration and resources required could be accommodated more efficiently,” Anderton stated.

Representatives of Labour, the main opposition party, commented in favour of the policy paper, which they said would be considered a priority should the party assume government after the general elections in November. They also said that the neglect of dental services under the current National government has led to a dangerous reduction in oral-health outcomes.

Representatives of the Ministry of Health and the New Zealand Dental Association refused to comment on the paper.

Parliamentary building (“Beehive”) in Wellington. (DTI/Photo Tupungato)

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Sing university appoints new executives to strengthen medical and dental cooperation

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG: In an effort to enhance synergies between medical and dental research and education, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has appointed three senior academics to leading posts in the university’s key health education bodies. Prof. Benjamin Ong, senior neurologist and incumbent Chief Executive of the National University Health System, a public joint venture that oversees the operations of all health-related institutions, including the Faculty of Dentistry, has announced that he will be assuming the duties of Senior Vice-President of Health Affairs from July.

In addition, Prof. Yeoh Khay Guan, a renowned cancer expert, will become Dean of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, the university’s medical school. He will succeed Prof. John Wong Eu Li, who has been appointed Vice-Provost for Academic Medicine. NUS President, Prof. Tan Chorh Chuan, welcomed the appointments, which he believes will further integrate health education and research with clinical practice and patient care, and have great impact on future medical and dental education in Singapore and other countries.

The NUS has one of the oldest and largest dental schools in South-East Asia.

Penn receives millions for Korean studies

From news report

PHILADELPHIA, USA: University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine (Penn) President Amy Gutmann recently announced a US$7.5 million gift from alumni in support of Penn’s Korean Studies Program. She also signed a memorandum of understanding between Penn and Seoul National University (SNU), Korea’s oldest national university.

The memorandum of understanding will facilitate further collaborative research projects and other academic activities, including a revived Penn-in-Seoul program for 20 Penn students beginning this July. Students will take classes at SNU and participate in internships at multinational corporations and government agencies in Korea.

Gutmann also announced two gifts to Penn’s Korean Studies Program at a gathering of more than 500 alumni in Seoul. Alumni James Joo-Jin Kim gave US$6 million to the Korean Studies Program, to be renamed the James Joo-Jin Kim Program in Korean Studies, and an anonymous alumnus gave US$1.5 million to establish a post-doctoral fellowship in Korean Studies.

“Because the Republic of Korea is such an important global presence, I am especially pleased to be able to announce this gift in Seoul,” Gutmann said. “Joo-Jin Kim’s generosity will enable us to expose an even wider community of students to Korea—by weaving an understanding and appreciation of the country into the fabric of academic life at Penn.”

Korea represents the third-largest country of origin for international students at Penn—comprising roughly 11 per cent of all international students at the University. More than 1,100 alumni currently reside in Korea, and Penn had 545 graduate and undergraduate students from there in 2010/11.

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