

Editorial

Need to appoint dental surgeon at every Public Health Centre (PHC) in Rural India

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Oral health is neglected by a majority of the general Indian population. There is a prevailing misconception amongst the general public that oral health and general health do not have any correlation; but through years of sound research it has been established that oral health is a mirror of general health. Many medical conditions can be diagnosed by seeing oral changes much before the disease starts showing its own symptoms. It is also known that poor oral hygiene can be a predisposing factor for many chronic medical diseases.

A few decades ago the number of qualified dental surgeons in India was far too low than it is today. We must congratulate the foresight and planning of the Dental Council of India and Government of India, which has systematically increased this number to cater to the dental needs of our growing population. Majority of dental graduates are based in the urban part of India which does not bode well for the future of dental health of our country. Rural India is still deprived of general dental care. The time has come that the government takes up this issue seriously, and formulates a plan to appoint dental surgeons in rural areas, similar to the appointment of medical officers at Public Health Centres (PHC).

We are in a position to provide basic dental treatment to our rural population through the existing strong network of PHC at every village. Certain specialized dental treatments can be provided through the district hospitals where Government of India can appoint various dental specialists to address specific requirements of patients which cannot be addressed by dental PHC. By maintaining good oral hygiene many systemic diseases can be avoided or at least controlled within limits.

Appointing a dental surgeon at every PHC will ensure that the gingival, periodontal and dental health of the rural population of India is taken care of. This may reduce the burden of treating many chronic systemic diseases.

It is established that chronic periodontitis has strong association with diseases such as diabetes mellitus and cardiac diseases. It can also worsen pre-existing medical conditions. It has been shown to affect pregnant females leading to premature birth, babies with low birth weight or even still birth. Research is going on to find out more about the effects of periodontal diseases on rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, obesity and other common diseases.

Even today many general physicians do not refer chronically ill patients for a dental consultation. This attitude must change in order to provide a holistic treatment approach to patients. Awareness of oral health should be increased not only in the general population but also amongst medical practitioners. Every dental graduate must put in their sincere effort to make, medical practitioners in their circle, aware of oral health and its effect on general health without waiting for the government to act on this issue.

It is very earnestly urged to the Dental Council of India to take persistent effort to appoint dental surgeon at every PHC and dental specialists at every district hospital for better oral and dental health care of rural Indian population and also to increase oral health awareness amongst medical practitioners.

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