

# What are the Current Problems and Major Challenges of the Care for Periodontal Health

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## Opinion

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The worldwide prevalence of periodontal diseases is 5-20% in the adult population. Periodontitis is the second largest oral health problem, affecting 10-15% of the world's population. The most severe forms of periodontal diseases significantly affect adults, which are 35-44 years of age with prevalence of 19%. The recent systematic reviews of the Global Burden of Disease Study (GBD) in 2010 that use a large dataset of 291,170 individuals (aged 15-99) from 37 different countries show that severe periodontitis is the sixth most prevalent among all 291 diseases and conditions, affecting 11,2% of the global population, or 743 million people. According to some authors severe periodontitis has significant socio-economic impacts and it indeed accounts for a surprisingly high global cost (US\$54 billion yearly) of lost productivity. According to the American Academy of Periodontology, chronic periodontitis is more prevalent among adults; the amount of bone loss is compatible with local characteristics; subgingival calculus is a common finding; and the disease usually has slow to moderate progression. Notably, chronic periodontitis is the major cause of severe tooth loss and edentulism in the adult population worldwide.

Periodontitis is linked with other systemic conditions, including chronic noncommunicable diseases. In general, three elements are crucial for such connections. Firstly, periodontitis is a serious infection. It has been shown that bacterial cells from subgingival biofilms may gain access to systemic blood circulation, after dental manipulations (such as scaling and tooth extraction) or even after daily-life activities, e.g. tooth brushing, flossing and chewing. In fact, these bacteria can colonize and/or invade body tissues, and they have been detected in atheroma plaques. Secondly, bacteraemia, together with the release of bacterial toxins and inflammatory mediators from the periodontal area, can increase the level of systemic inflammation. Thirdly, periodontitis shares common risk

factors with chronic noncommunicable diseases, including lifestyle factors, e.g. smoking and alcohol consumption; metabolic factors, e.g. diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome; dietary factors and stress.

A number of studies show that periodontitis influence the quality of life (QoS) of patients. It affects negatively the physical, functional and psychological well-being, as well as the social activity of individuals. The more severe stages of periodontitis, associated with greater depth of the periodontal pockets, mobility and displacement of teeth, have a greater negative impact.

## What are the Current Problems and Major Challenges of the Care for Periodontal Health?

Periodontal diseases are truly a 'silent' global epidemic with a huge disease burden and socio-economic effects. Unfortunately, awareness of periodontal health remains low worldwide, and the majority of people affected do not initiate early care, due to various personal, cultural and socio-economic factors.

One reason for the low awareness among the general public may be due to the fact that oral health and oral care are not part of the healthy lifestyle recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is also noted that periodontal health is not reflected in national health policies or guidelines that mainly focus on targeting chronic noncommunicable diseases. In general, periodontal health is not perceived as a health issue, but rather a 'cosmetic' problem by many individuals and patients, due to various reasons. Patients may believe that their missing teeth can effectively be replaced and reconstructed by dental implants but this procedure poses an increased risk for the development of peri-implantitis especially in periodontally susceptible individuals.

A number of studies have reported that service availability and economic barriers are the major causes of periodontal health inequalities in the world. It should also be highlighted that oral care is usually not part of public health services, and access to professional care is difficult (especially for people with low income).

#### **What Recommendations Can Be Made To Improve Population Periodontal Health?**

Periodontal health literacy should be improved. The ability to build periodontal literacy is essential for

proactive awareness of periodontal health and disease prevention among the public and dental professional communities. The link between oral diseases and general diseases should be communicated intensively to the medical profession to establish an interdisciplinary team to better manage the individuals already affected by periodontal disease. More efforts should be made to raise the awareness of periodontal health and appropriate care among general dental practitioners and other healthcare professionals.

