

PARTNERING GENERAL PRACTITIONERS TO ADVANCE COMMUNITY ORAL HEALTH

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Oral health has long been overlooked in the medical community. We are not well versed in anything more than the rudimentary aspects of oral health. The medical school curriculum is also lacking in coverage of this area of medicine. This is despite the fact that oral health and hygiene is often one of the first indicators of the general health of the individual, and of disease.

Many of us in Family Practice see the very young in our daily work. Neonates, infants and toddlers make up, for some of us, a large part of our clinical responsibilities. We are often faced with questions from anxious parents such as teething issues, new tooth eruption, tongue tie and the list goes on.

The College is very pleased to have the collaboration with and sponsorship of the Health Promotion Board to conduct a Family Practice Skills Course on oral health in primary care for our Family Physicians.

In Unit 1 – “The General Practitioner – An Ally in Oral Health Promotion” – Dr Hilary Thean and Dr Wong Mun Loke point out the fact that more people visit their general medical practitioners each year than any other health professional. This first point of contact for patients can facilitate preventive dental care through timely referrals to our dental colleagues.

In Unit 2 – “Quick Oral Health Facts about the Young” – Dr Ng Jing Jing and Dr Wong Mun Loke have provided an excellent set of useful facts. The section on remedies for easing teething problems will be particularly useful for the busy general practitioner.

TAN TZE LEE, Honorary Editor, College of Family Physicians Singapore

In Unit 3 – “Recognising Common Adult Oral Conditions” – Dr Rahul Nair, Dr Adeline Wong, Dr Joanna Ngo and Dr Wong Mun Loke highlight the common oral problems in the adult population which are dental caries, and periodontal disease. The prevention of oral diseases has now taken on the strategy of targeting a small set of risk factors that are important for a large number of diseases. This Common Risk Factor Approach aims to reduce risk factors in diet, stress, hygiene, smoking, alcohol, lack of exercise and injuries to prevent the onset of a range of diseases including dental caries and periodontal disease.

In Unit 4 – “Ageing and its Influence on the Oral Environment” – Dr Hilary Thean and Dr Wong Mun Loke cover issues which are specific to the ageing process and highlight some of the oral problems the elderly may encounter. These include changes to the oral mucosa, diminished taste and muscular function resulting in compromised chewing, digestion, and swallowing.

In Unit 5 – “Helping the Silver Generation Smile – Part 1” – Dr Adeline Wong, Dr Joanna Ngo and Dr Hilary Thean elaborate on the common dental conditions and issues among the elderly namely, periodontal disease, root caries, tooth loss and replacement with dental prostheses.

In Unit 6 – “Helping the Silver Generation Smile – Part 2” – Dr Adeline Wong and Dr Joanna Ngo elaborate on the common medical conditions associated with dental problems namely, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, medications resulting in xerostomia, effects of radiation therapy, oral cancer, antibiotic prophylaxis guidelines and osteonecrosis of the jaws as an effect of bisphosphonates.

This Family Practice Skills Course on Oral Health in Primary Care will be an excellent aid to our busy Family Physicians. Thanks are due to the Health Promotion Board for sponsoring this course, and to Dr Wong Mun Loke, Dr Hilary Thean, Dr Adeline Wong, Dr Joanna Ngo, Dr Ng Jing Jing, Dr Rahul Nair, Ms Samantha Bennett and their colleagues for writing the material for this course.