



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Every child has a toothbrush

Worldwide, children are affected by oral diseases, most notably dental caries. This condition causes pain, difficulty eating, hours lost at school and a decreased quality of life. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 60–90% of school children and nearly 100% of adults have dental caries. Further, oral disease in children and adults is higher among poor and disadvantaged populations (1).

The WHO advocates for stimulating the development and implementation of community-based projects for oral health promotion and prevention of oral disease with a focus on disadvantaged and poor population groups (1). As preventive oral health specialists, dental hygienists have an opportunity to change the oral health of the public.

The members of the IFDH recognize that preventing dental caries starts by using a very powerful tool: a toothbrush. Yet, many children do not know how to use a toothbrush correctly, may not have their own toothbrush or share a single toothbrush among all family members. For those inspired to improve the oral health of children, the IFDH is launching the 'Every Child has a Toothbrush' campaign. The programme is designed to teach children how to use a toothbrush effectively so they can better control biofilm and reduce the risk of tooth decay. Our goal is to have dental hygiene volunteers from every member country of the IFDH instituting this programme by the time of the IFDH House of Delegates meeting and Scientific Symposium in June, 2016.

To be part of the programme, dental hygienists must create a community-based event that involves providing oral health education to children, teaching toothbrushing techniques and conducting an oral examination to determine other needs. The programme requires dental hygienists to document numbers of children examined, type of toothbrushing instruction provided and a 3-month follow-up programme in which the children are re-examined and toothbrushing techniques are reinforced. Referrals for further dental care needed should be made as part of this community intervention. Dental hygienists may choose to add to the programme by performing placement of sealants and/or fluoride varnish, but the

emphasis of the programme must be on education and proper toothbrushing.

The IFDH is very fortunate to have obtained corporate partnership from Procter and Gamble and Premier to date. It is our hope that more companies will join us in this endeavour. Small grants up to \$250 will be awarded to help support these community-based projects as well as toothbrushes.

Dental hygienists interested in conducting an Every Child has a Toothbrush programme must be a licensed dental hygienist who is either an IFDH individual member or a member of an IFDH member country. The one-page application is available on the IFDH website at www.ifdh.org. At the completion of the project, the dental hygienist will be required to complete a one-page summary report indicating the number of children who began the programme, the number of children able to brush their teeth correctly, the number of children seen at the 3-month follow-up intervention, the number of children able to brush correctly at that time, additional preventive services provided, a list of materials distributed, the number of referrals made to dentists and other healthcare providers, and the number of children who sought oral health care as recommended. These data will be posted on the Community Health page of the IFDH website to showcase the efforts being made to combat oral disease.

Working together, one child at a time, we can make a significant difference in changing the caries rate of the public. Please join us on this campaign and apply today. Every child needs a healthy mouth to live a healthy life.

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Reference

- 1 World Health Organization. Oral Health Fact Sheet No. 318. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs318/en> (accessed 4 November 2014).

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