

Editorial

Managing periodontal conditions: Are dentists giving its due importance?

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Epidemiological studies indicate that periodontal conditions are common among children and adult populations in Tanzania (Mumghamba et al 2006, Lembariti et al 1988, Kida et al 2006). It also common to see elders walking in streets with visible dental calculus deposits as well as teeth that are tilting aside due to periodontal breakdown. In clinics, majority of patients who attend for dental treatment usually have at least one site that has gingivitis or dental calculus. Majority of manuscripts on periodontal health that are received for publication in Tanzania Dental Journal generally show that periodontal conditions are prevalent in Tanzania and in other African countries. Unfortunately, periodontal conditions rarely cause pain to patients, therefore few demand for periodontal therapy in our dental clinics. In addition, little effort has been undertaken to raise awareness on the importance of having healthy gums. A summary of attendances at the School of Dentistry, MUHAS in October 2017 support this fact as only less than 20% of patients seeking care were due to periodontal conditions. In the current TDJ issue, the article from Tanzania titled "Periodontal status and treatment needs among cardiac patients at Muhimbili National Hospital, Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania" clearly show that periodontal conditions are prevalent. There were generalized abundance of calculus and bleeding on probing almost in all teeth examined also support this fact.

The mere fact that dental calculus was abundant shows that no attempts had been done to treat this condition. The generalized presence of bleeding on probing in almost all sites examined also indicate that the examined population has never received oral hygiene instruction to enable them improve their oral hygiene practices.

Although, these conditions rarely cause pain to patients, but the accumulating evidence on the relationship between periodontal conditions and systemic diseases and conditions need to arouse interest among dental practitioners on the need to take rigorous action in managing periodontal conditions. There are a number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses which indicate that periodontitis is a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases (CVD) (4-7). On the other hand, treatment of periodontal disease has been shown to improve the endothelial function of blood vessels (8). There are also a number of systemic review that show that periodontal diseases may lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes (9, 10)

In Tanzania, health professionals, are required to do all their best to improve the quality of lives of Tanzanians by controlling diseases and conditions that negatively affect the well-being of Tanzanians. In view of the increasing evidence on the relationship between periodontal diseases and systemic chronic conditions in conjunction with the fact that currently Tanzania is facing an increasing number of people with chronic systemic diseases, dental practitioners in Tanzania are likely to contribute greatly in the control of these chronic systemic diseases. This can easily be achieved by managing periodontal conditions. Since periodontal diseases rarely cause pain, dental practitioners have a responsibility of raising awareness among the population through giving health information on the possible dangers of poor periodontal health. This can be done through:

- 1) patients that come to seek dental care at our dental clinics;
- 2) coordinated oral health information delivery system through mass media;
- 3) Reproductive and Child Health clinics, and
- 4) school settings.

This editorial has been written to stimulate readers on the urgent need of taking active role in managing periodontal diseases as a contribution to the efforts of controlling systemic chronic disease as well as improving pregnant outcomes in Tanzania and other countries where management of periodontal diseases is neglected. I therefore call upon all dental practitioners to seriously think of improving lives of our populations through improving periodontal health. It can be done, play your part.

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