

Editorial

Advances in dentistry and their applications in attaining big results now

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Since independence 54 years ago, Tanzania has strived to improve people's education, health and social economic status. Nevertheless, dental services are still located in urban administrative centres despite majority of Tanzanians to be still living in rural areas. This denies rural dwellers an opportunity to access dental services. This is not in line with the outcome of improved communication infrastructures which has made easy availability of cariogenic food staffs countrywide (1). Thus the common oral diseases; dental caries, periodontal diseases and oral cancers are seen to affect both rural and urban populations. Data from national oral health survey conducted in 2005 point to this fact in that the prevalence of oral pain that necessitate Tanzanians to seek oral care was 59% and was similar among rural and urban population (2). Reasons for seeking care late were identified as negligence and lack of money to pay for dental services, and majority knowingly stay with open carious cavities for more than two years (2, 3).

Published reports show that patients are dissatisfied with oral care especially in aspects of cost of treatment and explanation of treatment to patients by dental practitioners (4, 5); dissatisfied with waiting and treatment time; cost of treatment and infection control (5), and with effectiveness of local anaesthesia (6). The top six barriers to restorative care were no advice from dental practitioners; lack of knowledge about restorative care; lack of habit for going for check-ups; bother that one may get in seeking restorative care; past experience with dental treatment; and high fee for restoration (7). The treatment rendered in majority of our dental clinics is tooth extraction.

In view of the reports quoted in the above two paragraphs, which advances in dentistry should Tanzania adopt so as to contribute significantly to Tanzanian Government call of Big Results Now (BRN)? The main key results areas identified to achieve BRN in health are Human resource for health distribution, Performance management for health facilities, Health commodities, and Reproductive and child health (8).

In order for dentistry in Tanzania to contribute significantly to BRN, dental professionals should embrace advances that will lead each dental professional (1) to improve areas that dental patients are dissatisfied with by: (a) taking ample time to explain the treatment planning to patients; (b) striving to attain 100% effectiveness of local anaesthesia; (c) adopting the first come first served rule and cutting short unnecessary delays in patient management; (d) working hard and striving to adhere to schedules; (e) being cautious with cost of dental treatment by striving to achieve value for money. (2) to sell the dental profession to Tanzanian population by: (a) giving correct and scientifically sound information to clients; (b) advocating conservation of oral tissues using evidence based treatment methods; (c) practice professionalism in all context of one's professional life. (3) to update themselves on advances in dentistry. (4) Tanzania Dental Association (TDA) should (a) see to it that all practitioners are members of TDA and are accountable to the association, (b) ensure availability of a strong forum for dental practitioners that will allow dental practitioners in Tanzania to respond adequately to government calls for improvement of oral health, (c) put in place a mechanism for TDA members to participate in that forum to discuss issues of interest to the profession. This will allow dentistry in Tanzania to fit well into the WHO definition of a well functioning health system that responds in a balanced way to a population's needs and expectations by: improving the health status of individuals, families and communities; defending the population against what threatens its health; protecting people against the financial consequences of ill-health; providing equitable access to people-centred care; making it possible for people to participate in decisions affecting their health and health system (9). We should all be aware that changes are inevitable. What is important is how to forecast changes and plan to manage changes rather than wait and see. The former allows profession to survive through changes. The later leads a profession to extinction.

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