



The killers in our midst

Doctor explains how NCDs are associated with common oral diseases

By SITERI SAUVAKACOLO

NON-COMMUNICABLE diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases are associated with the most common oral diseases such as dental caries and periodontitis (severe gum infection), says the Fiji Dental Association.

Association president Dr Parikshath Naidu expressed this in light of the recent statement released by the Health Ministry that NCDs remained the number one killer in Fiji.

“Oral health issues are now recognised as a part of NCDs since the United Nations (UN) high-level meeting on NCDs in 2011,” Dr Naidu said.

“According to the World Dental Federation (FDI), oral health is multifaceted and includes the ability to speak, laugh, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow, and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions confidently and painlessly.

“Good oral health is a fundamental part of being happy and essential for maintaining a quality of life.”

The Nadi-based dentist said oral diseases and other NCDs share common risk factors such as smoking, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, substance abuse and alcohol consumption.

He says that tooth decay and gum disease — the most common of oral diseases, although preventable, remains one of the most common diseases in the world while oral cancer is among the 15 most common cancers.

Dr Naidu explains that a perfect example of the strong relationship between NCDs and oral health is that of periodontitis and diabetes.

“Evidence shows that worsening diabetes tends to lead to poor oral hygiene leading to increased periodontal (gum) disease, which in turn can lead to diabetes-related complications and further complicating any dental or medical treatment service delivery.

“High blood sugar has also been shown to be strongly associated with oral cancer.”



Fiji National University Dental and Oral Health student during a practical session. Picture: SUPPLIED

‘Need for more collaborative works’

By SITERI SAUVAKACOLO

THE Fiji Dental Association says dental services are rarely integrated with the different healthcare systems in tackling non-communicable diseases compared with other healthcare professions.

Association president Dr Parikshath Naidu said there was a need to change this.

“We need to change and enhance

this so that oral care can help expand the role of oral health professionals and become more collaborative with other health professionals on shared aims,” he said.

“This will help tackle the root of the problem instead of being focused on simply treating the disease.

“There may be high rates of advanced staged oral diseases that would require specialised care that is most difficult and unavailable in Fiji.”

Dr Naidu says the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of limitations to the public in accessing dental service and on the availability of routine dental service.

He says this will most likely cause a high prevalence of dental problems and loss of teeth in the future.

Dr Naidu said people should be motivated from birth to healthy behaviours to maintained regular oral hygiene care through tooth brushing and eating a proper nutritious diet.

Daily oral hygiene habits ‘essential’

By SITERI SAUVAKACOLO

RISK factors surrounding non-communicable diseases and oral health diseases have been further elevated in recent times as a result of the COVID-19 impact on the economy, says Dr Parikshath Naidu.

The Fiji Dental Association president noted this in light of recent statements released by the Health Ministry on NCDs.

“High economic burden, including costs of treatment, lost work/schooling, reduced economic productivity and cost of quality of life are similar in oral health disease as are in other NCDs,” Dr Naidu said.

“And so an integrated public health approach is needed to reduce/modify these risk factors.

“With the impact of the COVID pandemic on the economy, social and general wellbeing, these risk factors have been further elevated in recent times.”

Dr Naidu says it is imperative for people to understand that oral health care is like physical activity, which is one of the most important lifestyle-related factors for health, including maintaining a proper diet.

He explained to achieve and maintain good oral health, daily proper oral hygiene habits of tooth brushing with fluoridated toothpaste and a well-balanced, nutritious diet was essential.



Dr Naidu. Picture: SUPPLIED

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