



## Editorial The New Definition of Oral Health

The FDI World Dental Federation's General Assembly approved a new definition of oral health on September 6, 2016.<sup>1</sup> This editorial is inspired by the recent *Journal of the American Dental Association* editorial by Glick et al in response to this groundbreaking result of advocacy and strategic planning.<sup>2</sup> The report stresses the benefits to patients, oral health care providers, and policymakers that come with the new definition of oral health. This marks a shift from "treating disease to providing care and support of oral health and emphasizes that oral health does not occur in isolation, but is embedded in the wider framework of overall health."<sup>2</sup>

### Definition of Oral Health<sup>1</sup>

*Oral health is multi-faceted and includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence and without pain, discomfort and disease of the craniofacial complex.*

*Further attributes of oral health:*

- is a fundamental component of health and physical and mental wellbeing.  
It exists along a continuum influenced by the values and attitudes of individuals and communities;
- reflects the physiological, social and psychological attributes that are essential to the quality of life;
- is influenced by the individual's changing experiences, perceptions, expectations and ability to adapt to circumstances.

Rather than focus on treating diseases, this new definition balances disease and condition/status including physiologic and psychosocial function. The clinical practice of dentistry has focused on overall well-being of patients beyond the limits of treating disease. The most successful and appreciated dentists treat the individual by providing customized care/personalized medicine to address the individual's needs, desires, and concerns. This redefining of oral health will focus attention at all levels, including patients, providers, and policy, toward addressing emotional and physiologic concerns beyond the treatment of pathology/disease. This will benefit the overall health and well-being of patients.<sup>2</sup>

Oral health policy is now making strides to address overall health and wellness, whereas historically the focus has been more on public access

to controlling disease and infection. The expanded definition posits oral health as a fundamental right and espouses the psychologic and social benefits of a healthy smile that meets the individual's needs and "the ability to speak, smile, taste, touch, chew, swallow, and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions." It is hoped that the new definition will expand access to care for more comprehensive dental therapy beyond the current standard of managing pathology/infection that is available to the greater population, who may not be able to access modern private or socialized dental care. The last two decades have given extended attention to infections and the relationship between oral and systemic health. This expanded definition will bring focus also to the systemic relationship between dental health and mental well-being.

This new definition of oral health will ideally improve education regarding the benefits of comprehensive dental care and therefore result in raised awareness and access so that more preventive care can be provided, decreasing the need for disease-focused therapy. It would be ideal for all to receive personalized dental care and enjoy the benefits of a healthy smile.

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### References

1. FDI World Dental Federation. FDI's Definition of Oral Health. <http://www.fdiworldental.org/oral-health/vision-2020/fdis-definition-of-oral-health.aspx>. Accessed 7 Nov 2016.
2. Glick M, Williams DM, Kleinman DV, Vujcic M, Watt RG, Weyant RJ. A new definition of oral health developed by the FDI World Dental Federation opens the door to a universal definition of oral health. *J Am Dent Assoc* 2016;147:915-917.