

## The Importance of Dentistry

Dear Readers,

When it comes to allocating money to various medical professions, dentists have poor arguments to put forth compared to the classical medical specialties. At first glance, this makes sense, since one does not die from being toothless. Although one does not look very attractive according to today's standards, by selecting the right food one can survive, and with the appropriate skills one can talk as well. Therefore, money goes to the specialties that treat life-threatening diseases. This makes sense: one cannot live without a heart, uncured cancer will quickly bring about one's demise, etc. Thus, one could conclude that dentistry is not important, as it only deals with teeth....

However, this attitude may be changing. There is growing evidence of a correlation between periodontal disease and not only the risk of cardiovascular disease but also even of stroke. Periodontists have never ceased pointing out this fact, for good reasons: to firmly anchor dentistry and especially periodontology in the family of medical professionals. Unfortunately, populations and individuals generally are not terribly interested in risks; it is too abstract. A good example is smoking: people smoke despite the fact that they are aware of the high risk of becoming seriously ill from consuming tobacco.

Living now in the USA, I have noticed a different situation: It is obvious that one definitely can die because of dental problems. Just a few examples are given here of alarming reports in the dental literature as well as in the lay press:

A study published in the *Journal of Endodontics*<sup>1</sup> found that many Americans die every year from infections that begin in their teeth or periodontium. Looking at hospital admissions, it was found that more than 61,000 admissions from 2000 to 2008 were primarily attributed to abscesses of dental origin. Almost 90% were admitted to the hospital through the emergency room and 6 of those died. There are only a few cases reported in detail and they have triggered wide public attention.<sup>2</sup> One is the famous Deamonte Driver case from 2007, in which a 12-year-old boy ultimately died from an abscess because no one was willing to treat the child basically due to fi-

nancial limitations. Another case is a 24-year-old father in Cincinnati. Kyle Willis died from a dentito difficilis with a 3rd molar, because he could not afford the antibiotic which was prescribed for him during his first visit to the emergency room because of toothache. When he was later brought to the hospital as a true emergency, it was too late to save his life.

The main reasons for most cases of this kind in the USA are that patients cannot afford dental treatment, are not informed about the causes of dental diseases, and therefore neglect their teeth, starting a vicious circle. The longer they wait, the worse the situation gets and the more expensive the potential cure. Because of this, such potentially dangerous situations may occur. Under such circumstances, we must now say: yes, people can indeed die because of their teeth and dentistry is thus important for the health of the population.

Besides the classical preventive approach, which of course is the best and most cost effective for the individual, adhesion may also be very helpful. In all cases where caries is established as a disease in the oral cavity, by simply sealing fissures on teeth that are not affected yet and by making small adhesive restorations in early stages of the destructive process, cost-effective treatment can be delivered even for patients with limited budgets.

Dear colleagues, the only course open to us is to inform the public, which is one major goal of the International Academy for Adhesive Dentistry (IAAD). This is one of the reasons why we have added the IAAD pages as a regular addendum to the *Journal of Adhesive Dentistry*.

Sincerely yours,



JF Roulet

1. Shah AC et al. Outcome of hospitalizations attributed to periapical abscess from 2000 to 2008: A longitudinal trend analysis. *J Endodontics* 2013;39:1104-1110.
2. Potter W. Resolving to take better care of our teeth could save our lives – and billions of dollars. *The Huffington Post*, Jan 23rd 2014; [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/wendell-potter/resolving-to-take-better\\_b\\_4644648.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/wendell-potter/resolving-to-take-better_b_4644648.html)