Profile of the oral healthcare team in countries with emerging economies

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Abstract:

Health is a critical dimension of human well-being and flourishing, and oral health is an integral component of health: one is not healthy without oral health. Significant barriers exist to ensuring the world's people receive basic healthcare, including oral healthcare. Amongst these are poverty, ignorance, inadequate financial resources and lack of adequate numbers of educated and trained (oral) healthcare workers. Emerging economies are encouraged to develop a national strategic plan for oral health. International organizations have developed goals for oral health that can be referenced and adapted by emerging economies as they seek to formulate specific objectives for their countries. Demographic data that assess the nature and extent of oral diseases in a country are essential to sound planning and the development of an oral healthcare system that is relevant, effective and economically viable. Prevention should be emphasized and priority consideration be given to oral healthcare for children. The types and numbers of members of the oral healthcare team (workforce) will vary from country to country depending on the system developed. Potential members of the workforce include: generalist dentists, specialist dentists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, denturists, expanded function dental assistants (dental nurses) and community oral health workers/aides. Competences for dentists, and other members of the team, should be developed to ensure quality care and developed economies should cooperate with emerging economies. The development, by more advanced economies, of digital, virtual curricula, which could be used by emerging economies for educating and training members of the oral healthcare team, should be an important initiative. The International Federation of Dental Educators and Associations (IFDEA) should lead in such an effort.

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