Despite another decline in sales of dental materials and equipment in Australia last year, the organisers of the country’s largest dental exhibition have reported that they have sold out all available booth space for this year’s ADX14. They also said that they expect a record number of dental professionals to attend the show, which will be held at the Sydney Exhibition Centre @ Glebe Island this weekend.

Exhibitors are showcasing the latest dental products from Australia and overseas at ADX14, including new materials and solutions for an improved workflow in dental practices and laboratories. According to the Australian Dental Industry Association (ADIA), which stages the biennial event, many of these products will be available to dentists in Australia for the first time. Particularly in focus are Dental CAD/CAM and new digital practice solutions, which have become common in many dental practices.

In addition to the industry showcase, the event will feature an extensive continuing professional development programme, which is supported by dental associations and suppliers of dental equipment from Australia and abroad. These seminars are free to visitors and will cover a wide range of dental topics, including oral surgery, implant dentistry and practice management. Well known oral health care professionals from universities in Australia and other countries will give presentations on issues in aesthetic and preventative dentistry, such as restoration with new ceramic materials, over the course of three days.

“There is no mistake about it: this is the event that provides dentists and allied oral health care professionals with the best opportunity to see more, buy more and learn more,” ADIA CEO Troy Williams commented.

According to him, the upcoming ADX14 is shaping up to be the largest edition ever in the short history of the event, which has seen increasing two-digit participation since it was first held in 2008. The latest edition in 2012 in Sydney attracted slightly more than 6,000 dental professionals, according to ADIA figures, which the association expects will be exceeded this year by another count.
“Oral health promotion training is a tick-box exercise”

An interview with Stacey Bracksley, Melbourne

Despite being taught at university level, there is little information on the effectiveness of oral health promotion programmes in dental education, according to La Trobe University teaching fellow Stacey Bracksley. At ADX14 Sydney this Friday, she will be presenting the findings of a recent review on this matter, which she authored as part of her PhD. Today international had the opportunity to talk to her about the reasons for this lack of data and the importance of increased efforts to train dental students adequately in this area.

Today international: Ms Bracksley, your paper is currently under review by a scientific journal. Could you tell us a bit about your findings nevertheless?

Stacey Bracksley: The aim of the review was to establish what has been published concerning health promotion training in dental schools internationally. There is a dearth of research and this was demonstrated by the inclusion of only four published studies, which were from Australia, Brazil, Canada and Belgium. It was interesting that the health promotion content was delivered in very different ways. One dental programme used a hospital setting, where the students were interns providing oral health education to patients, whereas another dental and oral health course had a rural outreach programme.

It has been demonstrated that little evaluation of the health promotion training within these courses is taking place or may be taking place but not published, with only one of the papers using students’ personal accounts for evaluation. In some cases, health promotion was tacked on to other components in the course. Not one of the studies included evaluated the outcomes of the health promotion training concerning the students’ knowledge, both short and long term.

Although there are many health promotion frameworks that are used internationally as best practice but they were not widely applied in studies. Health promotion needs to include a spectrum of activities, from individual-based to community-based activities. What was found was that they are too focused on individuals, which has been shown to be ineffective. Using smoking as an example, we know that just telling people that smoking is bad for them is largely ineffective, but when we introduce a range of programmes, including legislation, community attitudes, regulations and settings, there is improvement in smoking rates.

While it is good that students are gaining some exposure to health promotion within their degrees, working at the individual level alone will never be as effective as using a range of strategies.

We know little about what effect these programmes can have on future dental professionals. Do you consider oral health promotion to be a relatively new concept, and if so could this be one of the reasons for the lack of information?

I would disagree that oral health promotion is a relatively new concept. For instance, a Whole of Community Approach to Oral Health Promotion (an international framework used to prevent noncommunicable diseases) developed by the World Health Organization has been around since 1986. Campaigns like Prof. Aubrey Sheiham from the University of Oxford and the World Diabetes Day in 1996, have been talking about the importance of oral health promotion for decades.

I think there are a number of reasons for this lack of data. For example, oral health promotion has taken some time to be accepted and implemented into higher education. One of the main issues however is that the ethos of dentistry itself is still very much centred on individual treatment care, rather than a holistic approach. This is deeply ingrained in the culture of the profession, making it difficult to implement oral health promotion.

Dentistry is also firmly rooted in the medical model of health, which does not fit well with the underpinning ideas of oral health promotion.

Why is training in oral health promotion generally needed in dental education?

In Australia and similarly in other countries, there has been a push to focus on prevention of disease rather than a reactive approach to treating them. Dental diseases have been highlighted as preventable and costing a substantial amount of money to treat. With this push towards prevention, we will need trained dental professionals to undertake these prevention efforts.

I think that by not providing oral health promotion training to dental professionals a key aspect of the overall picture is missing. It is like training students in one aspect of health care and leaving out the rest. Dental professionals need to be trained in dental procedures, but they also need to see the bigger picture of a whole person and how the environment affects their patient. Oral health promotion training can provide students with this holistic view.

Despite international efforts like World Oral Health Day in March, oral health promotion still appears to play a minor role in daily practice in general. Is there any evidence that increased oral health promotion has an impact on disease rates for example?

There is evidence to support oral health promotion. One of the major oral health promotion efforts was and still is water fluoridation, this has been attributed to a decline in caries rates. Using history to demonstrate the effectiveness of oral health promotion, we know dental caries rates peaked in the 1940s and then a decline in rates was seen from the late 1940s until the early 1990s in industrialised countries. Although the decline cannot be credited to any single cause, it is thought that factors such as dietary changes, daily use of fluoride toothpaste and the use of systems (water and topicals) may all have played a part in decreasing caries rates. All of these factors that contributed to the decline are oral health promotion efforts.

If we look to other success stories in population health, like the decreasing smoking rates, it was health promotion that made the difference. A whole of community approach using solid health promotion theory was taken towards smoking, with strategies such as legislation, smoking bans and taxation on cigarettes making the difference.

Should dental schools generally be required to offer more oral health promotion in their degree?

In Australia and other countries, health promotion is a competency for dentists and oral health therapists. Therefore, health promotion training does occur to some extent in these courses. In theory, graduating dental professionals should be able to understand oral health promotion and be able to apply this knowledge edge in the field.

However, there needs to be evaluation of this training in my opinion. At this stage, oral health promotion training is often a tick-box exercise: it just has to be somewhere in the course to meet this competency. There appears to be little regard as to whether the students’ understanding of health promotion is adequate and whether this will lead to long-term application once they have graduated. What I would like to see are dental professionals who have a solid understanding of things like the social determinants of health and have the ability to take these into account when treating patients.

Are dental schools adequately prepared to teach oral health promotion?

To some extent, dental schools are teaching oral health promotion. This is actually happening and it differs between schools as to who delivers this training, either dental professionals or public health professionals.

However, I think for oral health promotion training to be successful it needs to be integrated into the whole course and not separated from the clinical content. It must also be monitored and evaluated. At this stage, I do not think that this is being done adequately, so there is definitely room for improvement.

Thank you very much for the interview.
Welcome to our harbour city! Sydney is a vibrant, eclectic, hospitable and beautiful place that we are proud to call home. By attending ADX14 this year, you are joining the almost three million visitors who come to Sydney each year.

Beautiful parks, clean and lively streets, and a rich and diverse culture make our city an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of experiences. People from almost 200 different nationalities live here, making this a welcoming and accepting place.

Sydney—An ever-shifting kaleidoscope of experiences
A welcome by Lord Mayor of Sydney Clover Moore

Our vision for the city’s future—Sydney 2030—will ensure it is green, global and connected. I invite you to explore our urban villages, generous open spaces, first-class restaurants and nightlife.

On New Year’s Eve, more than one and a half million people enjoy our spectacular fireworks over the harbour, while Sydney’s Chinese New Year Festival has become the largest celebration of its kind outside Asia. Our beautiful parks, outstanding theatres, concerts and exhibitions, quirky laneways and world-class shopping are also highlights.

During your visit, the city will be filled with art for the nineteenth Biennale of Sydney, and you can also enjoy the great exhibitions and activities that are part of our Living in Harmony Festival.

I wish you a memorable and rewarding stay.

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Dental equipment manufacturers and dealers in Australia currently face a challenging environment, as annual sales of dental products declined in the last fiscal year for the third consecutive time. The market value of consumables and laboratory products in particular suffered from the effects of the global financial crisis and cuts to public dental services made by the previous Australian government, a recently published report by ADIA states. Significant growth was only observed in the over-the-counter products segment, such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, which grew by almost 4 per cent in 2013.

Although sales have declined, Williams said that newest data from his organisation’s Australian Dental Industry Business Condition Survey revealed considerable optimism about the coming year with most of its members to expect modest growth in sales in 2014. Impulses for growth are also expected to come from increased public funding for dental services by the new government as well as from the implementation of a new regulatory body for medical devices, which is going to replace the Therapeutic Goods Administration during the course of this year.

The total market for dental products, including over-the-counter products, in Australia was worth at least A$2 billion last year, substantiating its position as one of the top markets for dental products and equipment in the Asia Pacific region.