The emirate of Dubai has again become the centre of the international dental community with the start of the next edition of the UAE International Dental Conference and Arab Dental Exhibition (AEEDC) this week at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre for dental professionals from around the world. Held under the patronage of Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al-Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, the event is not only the largest gathering of dental participants in the MENASA region, but also the most prominent showcase of the latest in science, technology and products for dentistry.

This year, the international show is being held in Dubai for the 18th time. According to the latest estimates, over 600 dealers and manufacturers from the region and abroad have registered for the global dental exhibition. Among innovations such as new and improved dental materials and equipment, a vast number of advanced digital solutions are on display, which were developed to improve the workflow and communication between dental practices and laboratories for the benefit of patients. Current issues and methods in dentistry will be discussed during the conference, which will see clinical presentations by more than 130 local and internationally well-known speakers. A number of specialised courses were offered again this year prior to the congress as part of the Dubai World Dental Meeting. In addition, a student competition will be held among participants from universities in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, Oman, Yemen and Russia. Awards will be given for research and other contributions to oral health, as well as for best booth design and activities, among other categories.

“AEEDC Dubai 2014 will yet again supersede its previous records and achievements by delivering another outstanding event,” AEEDC Executive Chairman Dr Abdul Salam al-Madani said. “On behalf of the organisers of AEEDC Dubai and its team members, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all members of the oral health community and encourage them to seize this opportunity and benefit from the latest advancements in dentistry.”

The conference and exhibition are being held from 4–6 February. A part of the Global Scientific Dental Alliance and World Dental Exhibitions Alliance, the event is organised by INDEX Conferences and Exhibitions in partnership with the Dubai Health Authority annually. Last year’s edition attracted more than 30,000 dental professionals from the Middle East and abroad, according to INDEX figures.

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An interview with Prof. Manal A. Awad

At the upcoming AEEDC Dubai, Prof. Manal A. Awad from the University of Sharjah’s College of Dentistry in the United Arab Emirates will be holding a presentation on the relationship between the body mass index and periodontitis in diabetic patients. In this short interview, she gives new insight into the state of oral health in Arab countries, and why more research is needed to address oral health care needs.

**Today international:** Prof. Awad, how would you generally describe the state of oral health in the Arab world right now, and what are the most common features most countries share?

Cultural values appear to have a significant impact on health in general. For example, in the Arab world, less time is spent on preventive health care and this is particularly true for oral health care, which is seldom covered by insurance. However, in countries where oral health care is free, it is evident that people are more likely to visit dentists for treatments that could be regarded as more advanced and probably more expensive.

**What are the main differences with regard to oral health?**

Differences among Arab countries are mainly evident in the utilisation of health care. Financial considerations may have a significant impact on people seeking health care and this is particularly true for oral health care, which is seldom covered by insurance. However, in countries where oral health care is free, it is evident that people are more likely to visit dentists for treatments that could be regarded as more advanced and probably more expensive.

Living standards have increased in the Arab world in the last decades, at least in most of the Gulf states. In your opinion, has oral health kept up with this development?

There are known oral health problems, such as the relatively high prevalence of dental caries among children in most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Although there is ample data showing the extent of oral health problems among these children, more efforts are needed to reduce the incidence of dental caries in these early age groups. Efforts should include oral health promotion and education of parents and children about proper methods to maintain good oral hygiene.

For effectively reducing the burden of dental caries and periodontal disease, community engagement is very important. Attempts to change people’s perceptions about their oral health are essential to produce desired results.

**In a recent literature review you co-authored, it was found that epidemiological data on the prevalence of periodontal disease in most Arab countries is insufficient, particularly for the adult population. Is this a problem only related to periodontal disease or does this relate to oral health data in general?**

This problem extends to other oral health problems, too. For example, we do not have enough data on the prevalence of dental caries, malocclusion and other oral health problems, especially in the GCC countries. This data are extremely important for policymakers and stakeholders to plan oral health interventions that could address these problems and reduce the burden of oral health-related problems in these populations. However, research requires financial support, which could be regarded as one of the main obstacles to obtaining population-based data in many Arab countries.

**What can new studies contribute to the improvement of oral health in the Arab world?**

Studies that address oral health needs among adults and elderly groups of patients are important for planning future health care. More research can provide much-needed evidence for policymakers to implement oral health programmes that address those who need them most.

Decisions made based on research conducted in other countries, however, may not provide an accurate picture about outcomes of certain interventions. For example, in planning oral health promotion and education programmes, understanding cultural values, beliefs and social structure in the Arab world is important. Culture-specific values influence patient roles and expectations, and these must be taken into consideration when planning interventions that intend to change people’s behaviour to improve their health.

Thank you very much for the interview.