Singapore less than average in health care spending

Countries in Asia have been found to spend less of their GDP on health care than most other countries in Europe and the US. According to a new health care report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, France, only New Zealand provided more money for health care in 2007 than the average of all observed countries. Singapore and countries like Japan South Korea or Australia spent less than the OECD average of 8.5 per cent.

The United States currently spends more on health than any other country—almost two and a half times greater than the OECD average of 2.934 USD, adjusted for purchasing power parity. Luxembourg, France, and Switzerland also spend far more than the OECD average. At the other end of the scale, in Turkey and Mexico, health expenditure was less than one third the OECD average.

The 2009 edition of the OECD Health at a Glance report also shows that all countries can do better in providing good quality health care. Key indicators presented in the report provided information on health status and the determinants of health, including the growing rates of child and adult obesity, which are likely to drive health spending higher in the coming decades.

The report also had new data on access to care, showing that all OECD countries exceed the universal or near-universal coverage for a core set of health services, except the United States, Mexico, and Turkey.

They admitted, however, that there is a waiting list of patients requiring elective crown and bridge work, root canal treatment or dentures.

In Singapore, special dental treatments are subsidised only when patients are referred from governmental dental clinics. The national medical saving scheme, called Medisave, which is supposed to help individuals set aside part of their income to meet future personal or immediate family's hospitalisation, only covers one-day surgical procedures. The Ministry of Health has rejected demands to extend the scheme for private clinics to reduce waiting times. Recent feedback on delayed procedures came from patients asking for non-emergency elective treatments, such as braces and dentures, a government official said. She added that heavy subsidy without means-testing for these procedures will inevitably lead to long queues.

Medicover should be treated as a financial reserve so that treatment needs are met," Dr Angar Cheng, a prosthodontist working at Singapore Dental Group, told today international. "The key is to identify those dental treatments that should be reimbursed versus the non-optional treatments like tooth whitening, which should be taken out of the equation. There is no doubt that governmental clinics will be able to cope with the public demands with time.

New CE scheme in Malaysia could benefit Singdentists

Private dentists in Malaysia are soon required to participate in a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme in order to continue practising. Through the scheme, which is an addition to the Malaysian Dental Act of 1971, dentists will be able collect points by attending CPD seminars and participating in other CPD learning activities organised by the Malaysian Dental Association (MDA) in collaboration with the country's Ministry of Health.

According to MDA president Dr Lee Soon Boon, the new scheme was developed to further advance the quality and standard of dental care in Malaysia. Speaking at the 1st FDI/ MDA Scientific Convention and Trade Exhibition in Petaling Jaya in January, he said CPD is essential for dental practitioners, especially to maintain and improve their knowledge and skills throughout their working life.

“CPD has been compulsory for dentists in the civil service for the past five years and we believe that expanding the scheme to private dentists will greatly benefit the profession," he said. Currently, more than 50 per cent of Malaysian dentists work in the private sector.

Although a specific guideline has not been officially announced, the new scheme could also recognise points collected in other parts of the region. Dr Lee told Dental Tribune Online. He added that his organisation has already established transnational cooperation with the Singapore Dental Association and has been invited to be an accredited CPD provider for Singaporean dentists and oral health therapists.

Dr Lee also said that the FDI/MDA convention was the first organised CPD event to be accredited by the Singapore Dental Council and Ministry of Health.