Sinéad Kwant: While there is a growing trend for people to integrate technology into their lifestyles to improve their health and well-being, such as using apps to track diet and fitness or oral health goals, there remain larger global issues that impact oral health. While people in the developed world live longer, increasingly sedentary lifestyles have led to a surge in chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes. These in turn have significant implications for oral health.

“Good oral health is for life, not just for World Oral Health Day”

An interview with FDI President Dr Kathryn Kell and Philips CEO of Business Group Health and Wellness Sinéad Kwant

Kwant: One of the main barriers to people focusing on their oral health is education and awareness about the importance of good oral health habits and the impact on overall health. An other reason is that many people do not visit their dentist or hygienist regularly and discuss their oral health. They go when there is something wrong, rather than practicing preventative care. Working with the FDI, we hope to raise awareness of the importance of building good oral health care routines and encourage people to visit their dental professional and, importantly, to follow his or her advice and maintain good routines between visits.

What do you hope your World Oral Health Day campaign will achieve?

Kell: This World Oral Health Day, we hope that people will embrace the campaign theme of “Say ahh: Think mouth, think health”. We want people to make the connection between their oral health and their general health and recognise the close association between the two and the impact that one has on the other. We encourage everyone to share messages to many more people globally, to reduce the burden of oral disease. The global burden of oral disease remains significant and widespread, most people will be affected in their lifetimes. The message that good oral health is an essential part of overall health and quality of life is still not fully embraced everywhere, and individuals across the globe continue to suffer from poor oral health. Oral health promotion, as well as prevention and health. With almost four billion people worldwide affected by oral disease, it is our job to raise awareness of and educate people on the link between oral health and overall health and encourage them to develop healthy habits that last a lifetime.

In your opinion, what are the main risks or barriers to people not focusing on their oral health?

Kell: Oral health is affected by a wide range of social determinants that can impact access to care. Lack of oral health education, however, remains a main barrier to people maintaining good oral health. Therefore, we work hard to raise awareness of the importance of oral health and educate people on the intrinsic link between oral health and general health. We advocate preventative care, early detection and treatment to encourage people to adopt good oral hygiene habits and follow the advice of oral health professionals so that they understand the impact of oral disease on their overall health and well-being.

Tell us about the FDI and Philips partnership and why it's important?

Kell: Philips is a key ally in helping us ensure the success of World Oral Health Day. As leaders in the corporate world, companies like Philips have access to an international community of diverse stakeholders and—by working together—we can disseminate oral health messages to many more people globally. We have seen through their World Oral Health Day activation efforts that Philips is fully committed to improving oral health through meaningful innovation. We find this type of support instrumental in helping us improve people’s oral health across borders.

Kwant: We know that good oral health can have important associated benefits when it comes to overall health and wellness. Working with the FDI, we have the opportunity to help people better understand their oral health, from the foods they eat to their daily brushing routine, and share knowledge and best practice.

What is next for the future of oral healthcare?

Kell: Prevention is key. We must shift our attention from a traditional restorative approach to one that emphasizes disease prevention and oral health promotion. Oral health professionals need to play a key role in educating patients on the wider implications of protecting their oral health. A more integrated approach to healthcare can help achieve better outcomes for patients with oral disease.

Kwant: We believe that we will see a move to more preventative care as the result of digitally connected technology. This also has the possibility of transforming the relationship between the patient and professional by introducing the ability to share brushing results or work towards goals. This will change the way dental professionals communicate with their patients and hopefully improve patient compliance between visits.

How does your partnership with dental professionals help to improve oral health globally?

Kell: Dental professionals are the principal providers of oral disease prevention and treatment and play an indispensable role in working to improve oral health around the world. They must take every opportunity to serve as global ambassadors for oral health and encourage patients to live healthy lifestyles in their daily practice. Education leads to action and action fuels change. It is up to us to educate the public about oral health and take action against the burden of oral disease.

Kwant: Dental professionals are key to improving oral health. By partnering with the FDI, we have the opportunity to team up and raise awareness of the state of people’s oral health. It is our job to understand the barriers dental professionals face when it comes to making sound recommendations and to provide solutions that help them to engage their patients on good oral health.

What is the impact of oral health on overall health?

Kell: Oral health and general health have a close two-way relationship. The mouth is a mirror of the body and offers clues about the state of overall health. Many general health conditions increase the risk of oral disease and vice versa. Oral disease can impact every aspect of life, including personal relationships and self-confidence, school and job performance, and even eating food. Maintaining a healthy mouth contributes to a lifetime of well-being and helps people live a better quality of life into old age.

Kwant: We are continuing to explore the link between oral health and systemic health, but we know that it has an important effect on overall health and wellness. A well-documented example of this is the link between diabetes and oral health. Diabetes affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, and the difference good oral healthcare can make to the overall health of those with the condition can be significant. Taking care of one’s mouth can have an important longer-term influence on overall health and wellness.

If you could give one tip or piece of advice about oral health, what would it be?

Kell: I would never be too late or too early to start looking after your mouth; your body will thank you! Adopting a healthy diet that is low in sugar, quitting tobacco use, keeping away from excessive alcohol consumption, and having regular dental checkups help protect the mouth and body at all ages.

Kwant: I would recommend visiting the dental professional, especially from a young age. I would like to encourage people to visit their dental professional or hygienist regularly and to follow his or her advice. The two most common types of oral disease, tooth decay and periodontal disease, are completely preventable with an effective oral care routine, brushing for two minutes twice a day. It is important to remember that good oral health is for life, not just for World Oral Health Day, and developing these habits from an early age can positively impact on longer term health and wellness.

Thank you both for the interview.