

Guest editorial

Challenges in oral health

The perception and understanding of either the presence or absence of health throughout the course of human history have acquired several meanings according to the scientific and cultural development of the societies.

It is important to analyze the oral health concept aiming at its complexity in the political, economical, and cultural contexts. The individual should be considered not only as a physical being who occasionally may be affected by disease, but also as a social being in whom the differences among people living in very different conditions should be considered in the broadest sense.

Oral health, as an integrating part of general health, is inserted within this context and the individual perceptions towards it are equally varied.

The changes and developments that occurred in dentistry practice throughout history are doubtless. However, the scientific and technological development in Dentistry notably favored the private practice, which has always been of excellence for the historical development of professional practices. In public health, the dentistry services for long time have based their activities on both the individual and the treatment limited to pain removal through emergency care and few programs of dental assistance to students.

Concerning to the professionals' concept, the dentists (traditionally graduated to act in private practice, apart from the social relationships, therefore restrained their activity field to the specific space of the offices in which they executed technical operative activities on the teeth and surrounding structures) found themselves facing another reality in which the public dental services became a new job opportunity demanding both a collective point of view and a relationship with the society.

In this sense, dental assistance characterized by the a set of clinical-surgical procedures directed to individual consumers should be replaced by oral health attention practices constituted by a set of actions including also the individual dental assistance but not only it, aiming to reach populational groups through actions of collective scope to keep oral health.

The search for health promotion of the society cannot be dissociated from its multidisciplinary actions. On the other hand, it should be integrated in a public health program seeking for both the life quality and the general health of a given community.

Then, we return to the dentist's reflection on this sequence of events leading to the modifications not only in the health concepts but mainly in the way of performing Dentistry in Brazil.

The creation of a social conscience among oral health professionals is mandatory to obtain satisfactory results in oral health collective actions, once the human resources have been given strategic importance in the planning and implementation of programmatic actions in oral health.

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