

# Smiles for Life: Model for Child Oral Health Promotion - A Proposal

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## ABSTRACT

Dental disease in childhood is a predictor of dental disease in adulthood, affecting speech, nutrition and quality of life. For the creation of Smiles for Life a well-established program would be beneficial for the present and future generation. A model for oral health promotion among children is proposed which could be implemented to promote the oral health status of children and in turn improve the oral health quality of life. This model combines the professional skills of dental professionals and emerging generation of public health dentists to form a unique *Child Dental Health Taskforce* and collaborates with *Public-Private Partners* to form an alliance to deliver oral health services through well defined oral health promotion programs utilising the existing systems of oral health services. Child oral health is of utmost importance and priority as “*Today’s youth are tomorrow’s workforce*”.

**KEYWORDS:** Dental caries, Health Services, Oral Health, Public-Private Partnerships, Task Force

## INTRODUCTION

Oral diseases are the commonest chronic diseases with dental caries being an increasing burden, especially among the developing countries. Oral health is as equally important and essential as general health for all. Oral diseases affect the quality of life of children and account for pain and absenteeism from school, impaired aesthetics, malnutrition, improper growth and development. Dental caries leads to limitation in daily activities, physical growth and if left untreated can also result in life threatening situations.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly in low socio-economic groups, children are at higher risk of developing dental caries as there exists an inequality in oral health provided at individual, community and national level.<sup>2,3</sup> Oral health promotion is a strategy to improve the health and well-being by planned efforts to build public policies, reorient oral health services, strengthen community efforts, and create a supportive environment to develop personal skills.

As dental health is an integral aspect of general health, an oral health promotion strategy can be devised to improve the oral health quality of life especially among the underserved and needy.

## PROPOSED MODEL FOR ORAL HEALTH PROMOTION

The primary essential role of dental professionals is to help the disadvantaged to achieve better oral health as it is considered as a fundamental human right.<sup>4</sup>

To address the needs and demands of the needy and right of each individual, a new model for oral health care is proposed suited for developing countries one of which is India, which has the basic components and infrastructure for the provision of oral health care (Figure 1).

The components of the proposed model include:

- Child Dental Health Taskforce
  - Public-sector Dental Practitioners
  - Emerging Generation of Public Health Dentists
- Private-Public Partnership
  - Alliance for Cavity Free Future
  - Global Child Dental Fund (GCDF)
- Oral Health Care Systems
  - Primary Health Care Services
  - Community Health Care Services
  - Tertiary Health Care Services
- Preventive Strategies
  - Meet the oral health care needs of poor and needy children
  - Community-based oral health education and treatment of mother and child
  - School based oral health education and treatment

### Child Dental Health Taskforce:

For any health care system to function efficiently to its maximum potential, efficient leadership forms the most important core element. A strong leadership at the national level as well as at each level of health care delivery is essential. Director of Oral Health Services should be appointed and numbers of public-sector dental

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professionals have to be increased to ensure adequate delivery of oral health services. Combining the rich knowledge and clinical expertise of the public-sector dental practitioners and the enthusiasm to serve and administrative skills of the emerging generations of public health dentists can lead to the formulation of a Child Dental Health Taskforce.

**Private-Public Partnership:** The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Private-Public Partnership as the ‘means to bring together a set of actors for the common goal of improving the health of a population through mutually agreed roles and principles.’<sup>5</sup> In health care, the most important Private-Public Partnerships is in health care services. Private-Public Partnerships combines the strength of private actors such as innovation, technological knowledge and skills, managerial efficiency and the role of public actors such as social responsibility, social justice, public accountability and local knowledge and creation of an enabling environment for delivery of high quality health infrastructures and services.<sup>6</sup>

**Alliance for a Cavity-Free Future:** A team of dental experts joined forces to help implement changes to dental health practices across the globe with the aim of promotion of initiatives to stop the development and progression of tooth decay in order to move towards a Cavity-Free Future for everyone. To achieve this goal, this non-profitable charitable organisation believes that collaborative action is required to raise awareness of dental caries (tooth decay) and positively influence people’s dental health habits. Partnerships with a range of stakeholders from dental health professionals to local public policy and education communities to the general public, a global collaborative action is initiated. Through the sponsorship of Colgate-Palmolive Company, this alliance supports to improve oral health through its partnerships with the dental profession and government and public health agencies.<sup>7</sup>

**Global Child Dental Fund:** Global Child Dental Fund (GCDF) is a U.K. based dental charity organisation. This reaches out to the most disadvantaged children globally. Through Senior and Young Dental Leadership Programmes, the charity invests in dentists by equipping with essential leadership skills. These are aimed at improving child oral health and developing social responsibility particularly among the emerging generation of dentists. GCDF aims at building a cadre of dental leaders capable providing of dental healthcare at local, national and global levels. GCDF ensures that the most deprived have access to dental care and does not suffer from dental decay.<sup>8</sup>

**Oral Health Care Systems:** To improve and maintain the health of the population of any country, health care systems form an essential component. These are a result of combined efforts of government agencies, dental institutions, primary and community health care services and other resources working with a common aim of providing quality health care for the people. Well defined

and designed health care systems have a strong preventive component which not only detects possible illnesses but also identifies, eliminates and controls potential risk factors through health care education and facilitates in the treatment. Thus ensuring a future with low incidence of oral diseases and ensuring a better quality of life.<sup>9</sup> Oral Health Care Systems specifically focuses on disease control, prevention and oral health promotion to maintain health and functionality of the oral cavity and adjacent structures. An efficient oral health care system ensures equitable distribution of government resources along with private practitioners who forms the major workforce in the country who influences oral health, combines community participation in decisions related to oral health and focuses on prevention rather than treatment.<sup>10</sup>

**Preventive Strategies:** Primary prevention is the course of action which prevents the onset of disease with the help of existing health care systems – Primary Health Care Centres, Community Health Care Centres and Tertiary Health Centres. With the efforts of Child Dental Health taskforce well planned strategies can be executed which includes: 1) Programs to meet the oral health care needs of the poor and needy children who suffer from oral diseases, 2) Community based oral health education and treatment of mother and child and 3) School based oral health education and treatment. These programs executed are aimed to provide basic treatment (Oral prophylaxis, pit and fissure sealants, topical fluorides and restorations of the cavities) aiming towards the common goal of attainment of access to quality oral health care so that none experience dental decay which could have been preventable through early interventions.

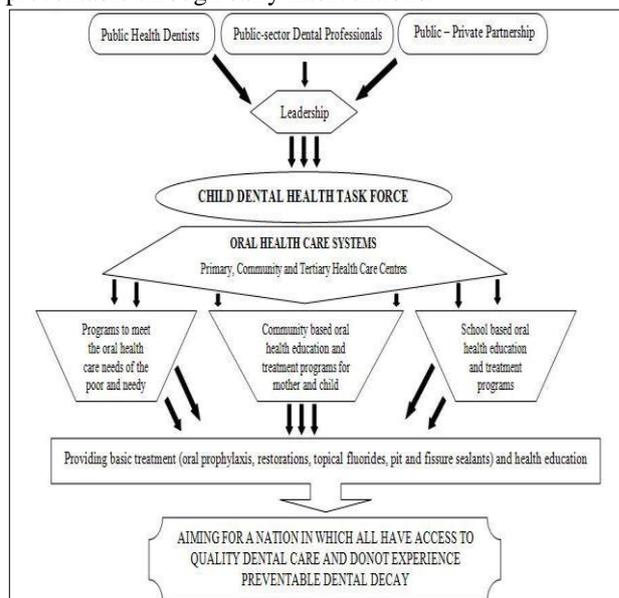


Figure 1: Model for Oral Health Promotion

## CONCLUSION

Oral Health is a neglected component of health and is given low priority in most of the health care systems. To strengthen disease prevention and health promotion the

model explained serves its primary objective of improving the oral health related quality of life especially among the underserved and needy especially in a developing economy like India. The proposed model tackles the challenging objective of improving oral health by the transfer of knowledge and experiences in preventive oral health care.

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