



Dental Care **Africa**

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# BACKGROUND

Oral diseases that are prevalent among children and elderly, especially the disadvantaged, has become an important public health concern in South Africa as a result of its high cost of care and the impact it has on general health and in turn quality of life<sup>[1,2]</sup>. To address this concern it is imperative to look at preventive strategies aimed at reducing the burden of oral diseases. Common risk factors exist between oral diseases and some of the major noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases<sup>[2,3]</sup>. Therefore the integration of oral health promotion into chronic disease prevention and general health promotion is imperative for the prevention and management of oral diseases<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Many oral diseases can be prevented or improved through behavioural changes if children are provided with basic knowledge and skills in health care practices in the formative

years of their lives<sup>[5,6]</sup>. Children and communities therefore need to be made aware of the risks associated with oral diseases and how they can become involved in preventing or eliminating these risks. This can be achieved through outreach, health education and health promotion<sup>[1]</sup>.

Although integrated oral health promotion interventions are mentioned in health policy documents in South Africa, there is no mention of the process that should be adopted for the implementation of these programmes and current literature shows no evidence of integrated health and oral health programmes<sup>[7-9]</sup>. Furthermore current priority strategies in South Africa are not evidence based as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Oral health professionals therefore need to form collaborative partnerships with other disciplines to attain sustained improvements in oral health in the long-term<sup>[10]</sup>.

Founder and Director Dr Mogie Reddy qualified as a Dental Therapist in 1984 and has worked as a clinician at a provincial hospital till 2009. While employed with the Department of Health she was involved with various outreach programmes (Red Cross Flying Dentist, Phelophepa, providing dental services to the disadvantaged schools in the Groutville area and for Faith Based Organisations) and student training. She subsequently joined the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2010. Her engagement with community services still continued with school visits and involvement with Faith Based Organisations. From her experiences with community dental services and witnessing the lack of comprehensive dental care, especially for the disadvantaged populations, she decided to undertake

her post graduate research study in the province of KwaZulu-Natal where there is currently a paucity of information on oral diseases and a blanket approach to current oral health promotion interventions being implemented that is not evidence based. One of the major obstacles identified in this study was the lack of resources and funding for oral health promotion interventions due to the high burden of HIV and TB in KwaZulu-Natal and therefore oral health not being prioritised. The knowledge and experience that she has gained from this project has therefore inspired her to form a Non-Profit Organisation. Dental Care Africa will form cooperative agreements between the Department of Health, Department of Education and other stakeholders involved with health and oral health promotion, so that assistance and tools can be provided to state and community oral health programs and oral health coalitions to strengthen their programmes. Dental Care Africa will be responsible for identifying resources and obtaining funding to improve oral health services in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and other provinces in South Africa. Dental Care Africa will further seek to expand cooperative agreements and develop formalized relationships with other national organizations in South Africa, Africa and globally in order to promote and accomplish our mission, priorities, goals, and objectives.



## Vision

A continent where all people will be given the opportunity to improve their health and oral health thereby enjoying a good quality of life

## Mission

To prevent and control oral diseases and conditions by using an integrated approach to build knowledge, tools, and networks that promote healthy behaviours and

effective public health practices and programs.

## Role

To provide guidance and assistance to prevent and control oral diseases and conditions, and promote oral health.

To build capacity and infrastructure for sustainable, effective and efficient oral health programmes



# CORE FUNCTIONS

## Preventive Strategies

Implement and maintain oral health promotion interventions to reduce the burden of oral diseases and conditions. This would include the incorporation of oral health promotion into health education and promotion.

## Evaluation

Evaluate implemented programmes to ensure its success.

## Research

Identify research opportunities and conduct research in oral health to monitor the burden of disease, risk factors, preventive services, etc. Ensure that relevant information that would impact on policy, practices and programmes be communicated timeously to the relevant stakeholders.

## Partnerships

Identify and facilitate partnerships that would support core functions.

## **GOAL**

The goal of Dental Care Africa is to support the National Oral Health Strategy of the National Department of Health of South Africa in order to improve the oral health status of the population using evidence-based approaches which would address:

- The effective use of fluoride
- Health, diet and nutrition
- Oral health of children, youth, elderly and people with disabilities
- Integrated programmes
- Addressing the social determinants of oral and general health
- Common risk factors associated with disease
- Oral health and quality of life
- HIV/AIDS and oral health
- Oral health reporting and information systems
- Oral health research for evidence
- TB, STIs and oral health
- Oro-facial trauma

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Promotion of oral health in schools.
2. Promotion of oral health among the elderly.
3. Building of capacity in the oral-health system with emphasis on disease prevention and primary health care especially for the disadvantaged,
4. Oral cancer screening for prevention of oral cancer and oral pre-cancer.
5. Strengthening and management of HIV/AIDS through screening.
6. Promotion of a healthy diet in particular a decrease in sugar intake and an increase in fresh fruit and vegetables.
7. Prevention of oral diseases related to tobacco use.
8. Development of oral-health information systems to provide evidence to inform policy and practice.
9. Promotion of oral health research.
10. Access to clean drinking water, general hygiene and improved sanitation.
11. Establishment of national plans for fluoride use through drinking water, fluoride toothpaste, salt or milk.

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