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MARCH 11, 2009

## **DepEd seeks partners in dental colleges; turns over nat'l oral health survey**

Because tooth decay is considered a non life-threatening disease, some 97 percent of six-year old Filipino school children have poor dental habits, resulting to learning difficulty, a Nationwide Oral Health Survey (NOHS) initiated by the Department of Education revealed.

This study conducted from November 2005 to Feb 2006 used random sample from 2,030 six-year old students and 2,022 twelve-year old students from the 17 regions in the Philippines. The study comprised of a clinical examination and a sociological survey.

The survey showed that each child had on average 3.4 teeth where the caries process had already reached the pulp, causing complications like swelling and pain, difficulties in eating, sleeping, concentrating on learning.

One of the survey findings offer a glimmer of hope however, as it showed that the school is the best place to institutionalize healthy habits.

Some pilot studies carried out in the country revealed that implementation of school based daily fluoride tooth brushing can reduce new dental caries by 40% and oral infections (fistulas and abscesses) by 60%.

Based on the survey results, Education Secretary Jesli Lapus called on dental schools nationwide to partner with the government in ensuring the oral health and well-being of school children.

"I encourage our colleges and universities offering dental courses to give preferential attention to our public school children," Lapus said. "Focus your studies and clinical practice on how to respond to the oral health needs of our school children," he added.

He turned over to Dra. Amalia Angeles, President of the Philippine Association of Dental Colleges, the results of the NOHS among public schools.

Based on the representative sample, NOHS gathered information on the oral health status of the 12 M public elementary school population in the Philippines, which represent 92 % of the nation's children. It provided key decision makers with information to formulate policies for preventive strategies and improvement of oral health care delivery system.

Among the study's recommendations is the concerted effort of government institutions in promoting oral health and general health, the medical and dental professions, the educational system and industry in ensuring that populations know the benefits of regular use of fluoride toothpaste.

PRESS RELEASE

The survey was technically supported by the Center for International Migration and Development, Germany, WHO Collaborative Center in Jena, Germany and the Department of Public Health of the University of the Philippines, Manila.

The survey serves as the baseline/ reference of the dental school or student for further research.

“I encourage our dental schools to come up with further studies using as baseline information the results of the study we have conducted,” Lapus stressed.

The survey had the financial support of InWent, Capacity Building International, Germany, Ivoclarvivadent, Liechtenstein and Palatinit, Germany.

NOHS is a population-representative study of two age groups according to WHO index age groups, 6 year olds and 12 year olds.

At the age of 6, the primary teeth start to exfoliate and the history of dental experience during preschool childhood time can be seen. At the age of 12 years, most children would have lost all their primary teeth and the full set of permanent teeth (except for the wisdom teeth) would have grown in.

For the 6 year old age group, prevalence of dental caries was 97%, with a mean number of Decayed, Missed or Filled permanent teeth (DMFT) of 0.7 and a mean dmft of 8.4 for the primary dentition.

For the 12 year old age group caries prevalence was 82% and the mean number of teeth with caries experience was 2.9 DMFT. On average, one out of these 3 decayed teeth developed caries progression into the pulp with resulting difficulties.

On gingival health, only 26% of all 12 year old subjects examined presented sound gums, 74% of the children had bleeding gums and/or calculus which is caused by lack of oral hygiene habits, specifically lack of regular tooth brushing.

The study also noted that oral diseases have not been given sufficient attention because these are considered non-life threatening. However, oral health and general health are strongly related to each other.

Children with severe dental decay (caries progression into the pulp) have significantly lower Body Mass Index (BMI) and the proportion of children suffering pain is 2.5 times higher in this group of children compared to children without severe dental decay.

“School based fluoride tooth brushing will become a regular activity in the Philippine school system to become the model for other countries in taking appropriate action to reduce high levels of untreated dental caries,” Lapus stressed.

**END**