

The Commonwealth Chewing and Smokeless Tobacco Cessation Statement

Tobacco use is a recognised health hazard and cigarettes are by far the dominant form of tobacco used worldwide. However, in many Commonwealth countries, especially those in South Asia, chewing tobacco represents over a third of all tobacco consumed. Smokeless tobacco delivers nicotine and is dependence forming. It causes considerable health risks; in particular it is a major cause of oral cancer. Recent evidence has demonstrated substantial amounts of tobacco specific nitrosamines (TSNAs) in smokeless tobacco products. TSNAs are the most common carcinogens in unburnt tobacco which are formed during the ageing, curing and fermentation of tobacco.

Smokeless tobacco products vary considerably and, in an unregulated environment, it is difficult for professionals and members of the public to know the contents of the different forms of chewing tobacco.

Health Professionals have a fundamental role to play in tobacco control and members of the dental team can play a special role in that process. Dental professionals have the opportunity to help people change their behaviour and then they can give advice, guidance and answers to questions related to the consequences of tobacco use in general and oral tobacco use in particular.

Members of the dental team should, therefore, be encouraged and trained to play a significant role in preventive measures, especially when considering the youth. They have the opportunity to promote social norm change, and forewarn children and adolescents of the dangers of oral tobacco use and assist in tobacco cessation.

Dental health professionals should themselves be the examples that a healthy society reflects upon. Many associations and establishments have started - and should continue - to designate their own workplaces as smoke- and tobacco-free. Adding tobacco control as a component of the training and education programmes of all dental health professionals is an important first step. Dental students should be trained in tobacco control during their educational years and so become more efficient at identifying and treating patients in tobacco-related issues, and be able to support their patients' cessation efforts.

Commonwealth Health Ministers are urged to:

- ◆ Recognise the dangers of tobacco use in any form
- ◆ Recognise the dangers and relative risks of smokeless tobacco within the general tobacco control programme and the role that members of the dental team can play in prevention and tobacco cessation.
- ◆ Request the collaboration, support of governments and international bodies (eg WHO, FDI, CDA, PAHO) to:
 - (1) Work towards the establishment of appropriate leadership centres and an international network in reducing chewing and other smokeless tobacco use
 - (2) Develop suitable continuing education programmes for members of the dental team to facilitate tobacco cessation
 - (3) Encourage the relevant national dental bodies to have policies on tobacco free work places and educational programmes on tobacco cessation
 - (4) Provide support for the development and evaluation of national programmes on preventing oral cancer
 - (5) Develop partnerships between civil society organisations and dental and other health professionals and the private sector, on tobacco cessation initiatives
- ◆ Direct the Commonwealth Secretariat to identify appropriate centres to monitor and evaluate the progress of the above.

Commonwealth Dental Association
London, UK
May 19th 2006