



Press Release WHO/28
7 April 1994

REVOLUTIONARY NEW PROCEDURE FOR TREATING DENTAL CARIES

A new method for treating dental caries that involves neither drill, nor water, nor electricity was presented today at the headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva on the occasion World Health Day, this year devoted to oral health.

The procedure, which was tested and evaluated in the field by Professor Taco Pilot of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, a WHO Collaborating Centre for Research in Oral Health Services, is called "atraumatic restorative treatment". It consists of manually cleaning dental cavities caused by caries, and filling them with an adhesive material known as glassionomer.

As well as adhering effectively to the tooth, this very promising substance releases fluorides that protect against any future caries. When it is applied at an early stage in the development of caries, it can completely halt its progression.

To use this procedure, oral health workers need only a few instruments that can easily be carried in a satchel. They can then use any form of transport, including the bicycle, to go and dispense treatment in the most out-of-the-way places.

Caries, which is the most widespread oral disease in the world, tends to go untreated in the underprivileged communities of developing countries, mainly because until now its treatment has required expensive equipment and highly-qualified personnel. Furthermore, the absence of electricity and clean, pressurized water sometimes makes it impossible for dentists to work.

Untreated caries makes huge and extremely painful cavities in teeth, and when treatment is finally provided, all that can be done in many cases is to extract the decayed tooth. The revolutionary procedure developed by Professor Pilot and his team is therefore excellent news for millions of inhabitants of poor rural regions throughout the world, and also for underprivileged urban groups and displaced persons and refugees, who are vulnerable.

In addition to the technical advantages already mentioned, atraumatic restorative treatment reduces to a minimum the pain caused by cleaning caries, since the hand is more easily controlled than an electric drill; it also avoids frightening children or even adults who have never previously had dental treatment. According to its promoters, this procedure is also highly suitable for the treatment of physically- or mentally-handicapped people, and for old people.

Atraumatic restorative treatment is now being tested in the field, in rural areas of Thailand, in collaboration with Khan Kaen University, and in Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the Dental Department of the Ministry of Health.



After watching a demonstration, Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of WHO, expressed his keen interest in this great advance, which is perfectly in line with the work of WHO in promoting primary health care. It will bring the objectives of oral health for all closer, objectives which have been underlined on this World Health Day 1994 with the slogan: "Oral health for a healthy life".

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The procedure, which was tested and evaluated in the field by Professor Taco Pilon of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, a WHO Collaborating Centre for Research in Oral Health Services, is called "atomatic restorative treatment". It consists of manually cleaning dental caries caused by decay and filling them with an adhesive material known as glass-ionomer.

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To use this procedure, oral health workers need only a few instruments that can easily be carried in a satchel. They can then use any form of transport, including bicycles, to go and deliver treatment in the most out-of-the-way places.

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