ORAL HEALTH

Even before the January 12th, 2010 earthquake, oral health has been a persistent public health problem in Haiti. Haiti had the lowest ratio of dentists to population in the Western Hemisphere according to the 1999 national oral health survey, at only 0.12 dentists per 10,000 inhabitants. Dental extractions were the most common procedures performed in public health centers and even those were difficult to obtain. It has also been difficult for health institutions to acquire the necessary dental supplies; and it has always been difficult if not impossible for most Haitians to pay for necessary oral health care procedures.

Since December 2010, PAHO/WHO has reinforced its Country Office with an oral health consultant for the development of a strategy to integrate oral health into the primary health care system.

In addition, PAHO/WHO has worked to develop institutional partnerships to meet the oral health needs in Haiti. Professional associations, dental school associations, dental research agencies, public health associations and organizations, and trade alliances throughout the Americas were mobilized to participate in the process.

As a result, the Oral Health of Haiti (OHOH) coalition was created, spearheaded by PAHO/WHO, with the objective of working closely with the MSPP and the University of Haiti to determine a viable path for rebuilding and strengthening the oral health infrastructure in the country. The coalition is comprised of representatives from: Haitian Dental Association, University of Haiti Dental School, Latin American Dental Federation (FOLA), FDI World Dental Federation, Pan American Health and Education Foundation, American Dental Education Association, American Dental Association, International and American Associations for Dental Research, US Public Health Service, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Dental Association, Hispanic Dental Association, Alpha Omega Foundation, Tufts University and many university dental schools.

Activities carried out:

Post-Disaster Oral Health Activities:

- Participation in Health Cluster activities to incorporate oral health into the rehabilitation of the Haitian public health system and development of Post-Disaster Guidelines for Oral Health.
- PAHO/WHO, together with the MSPP, conducted in-person assessments of 11 public dental clinics in the earthquake-affected areas in the West Department Data was gathered regarding infrastructure, human resources, capacity for dental services, financial resources, and oral health policy and planning. This information served as the basis for planning and for mobilizing necessary resources and donations.
- The OHOH mobilized resources and in-kind donations of dental supplies valued at US$ 100,000, 27 dental chairs, and $27,000 in cash. The donations were shipped to 18 institutions (11 public) in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas after the earthquake. Supplies were provided for: infection control, dental restorations, dental cleanings and consultations (for prevention) and dental surgeries.
- GPS data was collected for each institution and will be used to generate a map of dental facilities in the West Department. This activity will eventually be scaled up to the national level for a more complete evaluation of the national oral health system.

In response to the cholera outbreak:

- Guidelines were developed to orient dentists on controlling cholera transmission in dental clinics and to encourage their participation in the fight against cholera.

Challenges and next steps:

- Working with the MSPP to develop a National Strategic Plan for Oral Health.
- Incorporating the provision of oral health care into the integrated package of services being offered through the Free Obstetric Care (SOG, per its acronym in French) and Free Pediatric Care (SIG, per its acronym in French) Projects.
- Organizing training-of-trainers workshops for basic community oral health care delivery.
- Translation and adaptation of an Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) Oral Health Module into French.