



30 minutes with Dr. Hilary Cooray

At FDI Singapore 2009, the Commonwealth Dental Association (CDA) convened for their 6th Triennial Meeting. During the meeting, Dr. Hilary Cooray was elected to be the new President of the Commonwealth Dental Association. Dental Asia, along with CDA President-Elect, Dr. William O'Reilly, meets up with Dr. Cooray to find out more about the association and his goals as new president.

Q: What is the Commonwealth Dental Association about?

A: The Commonwealth Dental Association (CDA) consists of 53 national dental associations. It has a membership from all 5 continents. The economy of the member countries range from the industrialized to the less industrialized. That means we have the very rich people who can afford to pay for their healthcare and the very poor people who can't afford to pay for their healthcare.

The CDSA was established so that the people from the different nations could link together and develop themselves. Despite political influences of the various countries, we are able to sit down together as professionals and talk, thus ensuring diplomacy through the profession. This open communication and spirit of cooperation is very important.

Q: As new president, what are some of the issues that you would like to address?

One of the greatest problems is that there is no equity in oral health care amongst our member countries.

In some countries, the people have no access to oral health care. Take countries like Africa and some of the south Asian countries as an example. They might have to walk or travel hundreds of miles just to get access to primary dental care. How are we going to provide treatment to these people?

One of the problems is that the qualified, highly skilled dentists are not going to go to these rural areas. The solution might be to develop other types of personnel, like therapists or other auxiliary dental work force. And we will be happy to work within

the community. We have to encourage the governments, and the national associations to do that.

We have the commonwealth health ministers meeting every year in Geneva before the World Health Organization (WHO) meeting. This year, I had the privilege of attending that meeting, and we were able to interact with the ministers and share with them the idea that each country should provide oral health care, and make oral health care accessible to the poorest of the poor in their countries. If requested, we could also advise them on various strategies to do these things.

Q: Are there any dental trends that you notice for Asia?

A: The Asian population, those that live on the subcontinent, has a problem with oral cancer. If you take Sri Lanka, where I come from, the mouth has the highest incident of cancer from any part of the body. So the number one cancer site is the mouth.

We need to have programmes that educate the public on how to prevent that and empower the people in looking after their own health. Because most of these are preventable diseases, like periodontal disease, dental caries, and oral cancer can also be prevented. We have to get the people to do that for themselves because the profession is unable to screen every single person for dental caries or periodontal diseases to treat them. So the empowerment of the people about their own hygiene is something that we have to do in this region.

Q: Any other observations for Asia?

A: One of the problems we having in the developing countries is