**Title : “ SBV Initiatives for fostering Tribal dental care ’’**

**Dental health** is concerned with the oral hard and soft tissues. The goal is to prevent complications such as dental caries and gingival disease and to maintain the overall health of the oral cavity. However, dental health is frequently ignored and hence there is an immediate need to educate the community about the importance of oral health and the implications of poor oral hygiene.

**Importance of Dental Health**

Poor dental health profoundly affects general health. Evidence suggests that certain bacterial flora can cause heart disease, clogged arteries or even stroke. Gingival infections, such as periodontitis, have been linked to premature births and low-birth weight in pregnant women. So, practicing good dental hygiene is vital in eliminating certain dental diseases.

**Importance of Dental Public Health**

Dental public health is mainly involved in the assessment of important dental health needs and in providing effective solutions to enhance the dental health of the community rather than the individual themselves. Basically, dental public health strives to reduce the demand on the essential health care systems by prioritizing and directing the much needed funds and resources to such nodal or prominent areas.

**Impact of dental health on the community**

Poor oral health afflicts many low-income and other vulnerable populations. Lack of access to oral health can lead to unnecessary tooth decay, periodontal disease, pain, and the advancement of oral cancer. At the highest level, dental public health is concerned with improving the dental care delivery system, effective and efficient payment systems, and cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of different services and delivery models, to assure effective and sustainable dental services for the vulnerable groups.

**SBV Initiatives - Tribal dental care**

India comprises one-third of the world's tribal and indigenous peoples. Seventy years after the independence, India still struggles to close the healthcare gap between indigenous (tribal) and non-indigenous people. They are “everywhere behind everyone" in terms of healthcare benefits specifically, oral healthcare benefits. So, designing oral health systems that are accessible, and affordable is necessary.

Such equity based oral health care delivery is provided by various departments of Indira Gandhi Institute of Dental Sciences, a constituent unit of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth that is popularly referred to as SBV. SBV has launched itself into the committed task with a view to reach the poor and socially marginalized groups.

The armamentarium at Indira Gandhi Institute of Dental Sciences consists of specialized dental professionals, state-of-the-art dental diagnostic technologies, comprehensive dental care unit, effective and efficient mobile dental units and dental satellite centres and is ever ready to serve the general population.

Since the last few years, the dental wing of SBV has focussed on several initiatives for the larger benefit of the tribal population. A few noteworthy endeavours are there and I shall enumerate the same.

**Under the aegis of the Department of Public Health dentistry, we had :-**

* A three-day oral health screening and treatment camps for the **Thodas** at Coonor, Ooty.
* Periodical oral health screening and treatment camp for the **Gypsies** at Lawspet, Puducherry.
* Periodical oral health screening and treatment camp for the **Irulas** atIrular kudiyiruppu, Cuddalore. I feel happy to state that this program was organised in association with the University of IOWA, USA.
* Unnat Bharat Abhiyan to prevent hookworm infection among the **Irulas** at Irulansanthai, Puducherry.

**Under the aegis of the Department of Periodontology we had:-**

* Oral health screening and donation of tooth brush and tooth paste to Gypsies on account of “ **Oral Hygiene Month Celebrations**” at Lawspet, Puducherry.
* Oral health screening and donation of tooth brush and tooth paste to the **Irulas** at **Vanavil Nagar , Pachayankuppam ,** Irular Colony,Cuddalore (OT)
* Oral health screening and donation of tooth brush and tooth paste to the **Irulas** at **Sami Nagar** , Irular Colony, Cuddalore.
* Oral health screening and Treatment for the **Irulas** at Irular Kudiyiruppu, Panruti taluk .

**Under the aegis of the Department of Oral Pathology, we had:-**

* We held a program under the auspices of Indian council of Medical Research, Department of Health Research under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The project titled “A Model Program (MOCE – Model for Oral Cancer Eradication) was aimed at the prevention and screening of oral pre-cancer and cancer among **Narikurava** tribal population”.
* Periodical oral screening camps of more than 400 for Oral Potentially malignant disorders and Oral Cancer & awareness programs regarding harmful effects of tobacco and tobacco cessation among the **Narikurava** tribal people in and around Pondicherry.
* Oral health education and donation of toothbrush and tooth paste to the people of **Narikurava** colony.

The Departments of Public Health Dentistry, Periodontology and Oral Pathology have conducted numerous dental screening and treatment camps for the benefit of the tribal population. Education and motivation of the indigenous groups are absolutely necessary to improve oral health among the tribal population. As a part of social responsibility, dental undergraduate and postgraduate students had depicted an integral role in educating the tribal population on oral health, oral hygiene and the need for dental visits.

**To conclude…**

We must understand that most of the oral diseases are preventable. Indira Gandhi Institute of Dental Sciences, SBV has been striving hard by chipping in with the best possible efforts in organizing and treating the dental ailments of common people at nominal charges or free of cost. The cherished goal is to improve the oral health of the population through preventive and curative services. Hence, the responsibility to educate and spread knowledge regarding oral health care relies on us.