

## 'Dentist-population ratio in rural areas miserably low'

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A dentist and a patient is seen in the file photo.— AFP/File

**KARACHI: The Pakistan Dental Association (PDA) on Tuesday warned that availability of dentists in small towns and rural swathes was so miserable that fatal oral diseases among people could spread to epidemic proportions if corrective measures were not taken on emergency grounds.**

On the eve of World Oral Health Day, the PDA office-bearers flashed the warning at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club.

“In Karachi, a dentist is available for every 5,000 people like Lahore and Islamabad; but, for instance in Tharparkar, not a single dentist is available for the population as big as 200,000

people,” said Dr Mahmood Shah, the PDA president.

Dr Shah said situation of availability of dental treatment services in rural and remote districts of the country was going from bad to worse with each passing year owing to indifferent attitude of the relevant public health authorities towards public health issues.

He said dentist-population ratio had been alarmingly uneven across the country as it fluctuated heavily between urban and rural areas. He added that those statistics were far below the standards of public health services set by the World Health Organization and other global agencies.

“Opening of dental colleges in small towns could help as these institutions should not just be confined to big cities,” he said.

He added that proper activation of rural health centers of the provincial government could also improve the situation where dental surgeons should be recruited for such centers.

Dr Shah said such measures should be taken to extend dental care services across the country as oral cancer had become the second most recurring form of cancerous diseases in Pakistan after lung cancer.

He said various forms of chewable tobacco and other hazardous concoctions like gutka, mainpuri, betel nuts, supari, were being consumed in the society unchecked as it was equally affecting large cities, suburbs, small towns, and the countryside.

He said early screening and diagnosis of a case of oral cancer could ensure its complete treatment otherwise, it could prove fatal if a case was not referred to a qualified dental surgeon in time.

“If a mouth ulcer persists for more than two weeks it should be properly examined by a qualified dental surgeon,” he said.

He said apart from oral cancer, other dental ailments were easily preventable as that required adoption of good oral hygiene practices.

He said among children common oral health ailment was of tooth decay and among adults common dental problem was of gum or periodontal disease.

The PDA officials said common oral health issues could effectively be prevented by adopting good hygiene practices. Brushing of teeth twice a day was a compulsory practice for everyone.

Dr Nasir Ali Khan, Dr Asif Arain and Dr Anwar Saeed also spoke.

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