Editorial

World Health Day 1994
Oral health for a healthy life

Oral health has made remarkable progress in most developed countries as a result of prevention programmes that stress the optimum use of fluorides, oral hygiene, and the adoption of healthy eating habits.

However, the situation is beginning to deteriorate in many developing countries, where oral diseases are on the increase and treatment costs are spiralling. Yet oral diseases are not an inevitable corollary of development. We have the means to prevent this health and economic disaster; we have to ensure that these means are implemented for all citizens everywhere.

Action is urgently needed. In the countries that have achieved sustained improvements, health policies need to be adjusted, staff have to be trained to deal with the new situation, and appropriate services have to be set up. In particular, care for the elderly should be strengthened to prevent the oral health problems linked with age. At the same time, work among children and adolescents must continue.

Launching prevention campaigns

In the countries where the situation is deteriorating this trend must be checked by launching effective prevention campaigns. We must ensure that the adoption of new lifestyles and new eating habits does not lead to an increase in dental caries in populations that have always had healthy teeth. We must find ways of incorporating and encouraging the traditional methods of oral hygiene which have proved their efficacy, and which are inexpensive and culturally acceptable.

Oral diseases are not an inevitable corollary of development. We have the means to prevent both health and economic disaster. What is needed is to implement these means for all citizens everywhere.

Health, well-being and self-confidence are all boosted by a healthy and well-cared-for mouth, which also facilitates communication and human relations.

In devoting World Health Day 1994 to oral health, the World Health Organization is endeavouring to mobilize Member States, the health professions and the general public so that greater attention is paid to this important aspect of public health. Education and the participation of everyone are the keys to progress in oral health, without which there can be no health for all.

Let us unite our efforts so that the successes already achieved in the field of oral health can benefit everyone.