

Short Report - Articulating and implementing a health policy in India

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Abstract

It was 1885 when the National oral health policy was first drafted and till present the policy has neither been implemented nor presented in the Indian parliament for discussion. Is it not an irony that we Indians, though having maximum number of dental schools and also, probably with the prevailing trends would be a nation with the highest number of oral health professionals in coming 4- 5 years, yet have no oral health policy or any legislature for the same.

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Bangalore draft

The Indian association of public health dentistry has prepared and presented another draft for the National oral health policy in the national conference in Bangalore, November, 2011. The Bangalore National conference though grand on gestures was low on specifics and redundant of the previous 1985 draft. The discussion and proposed draft both were high on rhetoric's and low on reality; completely ignoring the changed scenario since 1985. Prior to the new draft formulation assurances were made that stakeholders will be invited from various sectors to incorporate their views. One or two sectors views were considered and the pertinent stakeholder, the common man whose opinions mattered the most were ignored. Can any draft be considered seriously or policy be implemented without opine of those at greatest stakes? People have shown that they are vocal, articulate and very much aware and cannot be brushed aside.

The Bangalore draft had no mention of the probable time frame within which the policy will be implemented. An uncertainty, about the drafts enactment as a law and the policy formulation that existed in 1985 continues in 2011. There was no mention on about how to convince the legislatures for policy formulation and also there was no time frame set within which to get the policy implemented. The questions that existed 25 years back persist even now.

Galvanize public opinion

Let us as dental fraternity show sagacity on script. Enough of dissection has already been done on the matter since the last two decades, it is now time for action. The matter has to be dealt with more subtlety, nuance and delicacy. The matter has to be brought in public domain. We need to galvanize public opinion towards the importance of good oral health and also to make the people understand the significance of good oral health policy. Public opinion cannot be ignored. Let the politicians see it as a

legitimate aspiration of people that those in policy making will respond to it. One way to convince our politicians is to form a lobby and get in negotiations with the major political parties. Let the legislators realize that good oral health or an oral health policy not only improves the oral health of the community in terms of dental caries or periodontal disease, but also prevents absenteeism from school for children, work loss for adults, improves the quality of life and may have a direct or an indirect effect on the nations GDP.

We need to come in confrontation with the mechanism in place. The authority is with parliament to pass the law but the people have the right to express. There might be difference in arguments on modalities but the aim remains the same. There needs to be a sense of urgency from all sides. When so much is at stake then laws need to be framed. To realize where we have gone wrong we need honesty of purpose and sincere articulation of the issue. Let's hope that finally we get our acts right and have an oral health policy at the earliest.

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