



**Bite**

# Word of mouth

24 DEC 2013

Featured

## Healthcare reform in 2014: whose health system is it anyway?

Spare a thought for the new health minister as he plans for 2014... Good dental health is important for overall health—so when will Australia see a national dental scheme? And will the government finally manage to address escalating healthcare costs?

### Teeth and all

A national dental scheme is desperately needed in the face of mounting evidence that our general health very much depends on the state of our mouths. Cancer, arthritis, heart disease are all more common if you have tooth and gum disease and poor oral health makes good nutrition more challenging for the elderly.

So a dental scheme would be a good public health strategy and needs to be developed not just around dentists but to include other members of the dental team - assistants, hygienists and oral therapists—all well trained and working in a delegated model of care to dentists.



Dentists do team care much better than medics since medical care is still very much centred on the medical model in which doctors call all the shots. This model is slowly changing with increased access to the various funding streams by nurses, allied health professionals, and even pharmacists, but such changes need to speed up.

### No "I" in team

With modern communication technology, there are no longer any reasons for a doctor to see the whites of a patient's eyes before providing advice. In fact, doctors may not even need to be involved in initial consultations.

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### This month...

*Evidence is mounting linking poor dental health to many seemingly unrelated health conditions. Yet funding strategies for public health are failing the very people they are meant to serve.*

*Our discussion this month focuses on this. Even though we have one of the best health systems in the world, our new health minister is setting future plans now & its in our interests to take notice and have our say.*

*Other than that we hope you have a safe and sweet holiday season. See you in 2014!*

Dr Simon Franks



> continued

Rather, what we need are appropriately trained professionals as part of a care team that recognises both their competencies—what they know—and their incompetencies—what they don't know and when and how to ask for help. This isn't rocket science but good team management with each having a role to play to make the whole system more productive.

Indeed, as we move into 2014 with a new government, this is one of Hon. Peter Dutton's major challenges—how to get more productivity into the health system.

The Productivity Commission report on Health Workforce (2006) suggested the healthcare system (particularly the public hospital system) was 20% inefficient and all we have done since is provide it with more funding. We need to look carefully at why the private system is so much better in term of outputs and outcomes. Is it because they have different nurse/patient ratios? Is it the complexity of the illnesses they deal with? Or, is it remuneration incentives—there must be some answers here?

We should know the answers to these questions because it is our health system—our taxes fund it and we should demand greater accountability from it. Although we have one of the best such systems on the planet, costs are rising dramatically.

#### Creative thinking

Some of the new health arrangements, such as Medicare locals, open opportunities for real patient engagement but only if we shift the focus from a medical model of health to one that is more focussed on the community—on education, employment and other social



determinants of health.

The Chronic Disease Management Scheme was—in theory—a great step toward multidisciplinary team health care which included Medicare funded dental care. Under this plan people with a chronic conditions are able to get benefits to cover allied health services that help manage their condition. Unfortunately, dentistry is no longer covered under this scheme, as of December 2012.



#### Bite Dental doing their part!

Dental care is a very important part of the overall care plan for people with chronic disease—especially in relation diabetes. However it is often a part that is overlooked. Under the Chronic Disease Scheme, we were able to look after the oral care of many people with diabetes who would not have access to dental care otherwise. Now that the scheme has been amended, the gap of people without adequate access to dental care is a real concern.



In an effort to relieve this hole in preventive dental care, Bite Dental are working together with a range of allied health professionals to provide free gum disease risk assessments and education for people diagnosed with diabetes. Simon and Jenna are also lead organisers for complimentary Diabetes Education Nights around Brisbane, where experts from a number of different health professions donate their time to provide valuable information.



If you would like more information on any of these initiatives, don't hesitate to ask us!

## Healthy Hygiene Hints

### Most common tooth brushing mistakes

*Not brushing often or long enough is the most common fault I see in most people's oral hygiene routine. Softly brushing your teeth at least twice a day is recommended by the ADA.*

*With too much time between brushings, bacterial plaque will build up, boosting the risk of gum inflammation and other problems.*

*Brushing should last at least two minutes. Three minutes is even better! Obviously, the longer the toothbrush is in your mouth, the more plaque you will remove.*

*Most people fall short of both time lines. It's an arbitrary number, but it's just so people take the time to clean all the surfaces. I often recommend people divide the mouth into quadrants and spend 30 seconds a quadrant. Some electric toothbrushes include built-in timers.*



*To make the two minutes go faster, I tend to 'multitask' fitting in a little TV viewing as I brush! For kids, there are some great tooth brushing apps that have interactive songs to help keep the tooth brush in their mouths for longer. The Macleans Nurdle Time app is a crowd favourite.*

*Jenna*

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