HKU Faculty of Dentistry researchers win international award for innovation

Prof Urban Hägg, Chair Professor of Orthodontics at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry, has been named one of the three winners of the 2008 Innovation in Oral Care Awards of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR).

Prof Hägg’s research group receives an unrestricted grant for US$75,000, sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare, and will investigate the effectiveness of the Asian plum (Prunus mume) in fighting bacteria commonly found in oral biofilms (eg tooth plaque). If the fruit is found to have natural antibacterial properties, it might one day be useful in preventing dental caries and gum disease.

Biofilms form on any surface where microbes are found in nature. The ultimate goal of the research project, A Natural Edible Agent for Reduction of Oral Biofilm, is to find an easy way for the public to decrease the formation of biofilms in the mouth—by eating a commonly available fruit. “Oral biofilms can harbour harmful bacteria that lead to tooth decay and gum disease,” says Prof Hägg. “We want the public to be able to have a natural routine method of preventing these diseases.”

Prof Hägg’s co-researchers in this project are Dr Ricky Wong (Associate Professor in Orthodontics), Dr Michelle Yuen (Master of Orthodontics student), Prof Lakshman Samaranayake (Faculty Dean and Chair Professor in Microbiology) [pictured, from L to R], and Dr Richard Kao (Assistant Professor in Microbiology, HKU Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine).

The prestigious IADR/GlaxoSmithKline Innovation in Oral Care Awards recognise “research in innovative oral care technologies that may maintain and improve oral health and the quality of life”. This year’s contest received 35 applications from around the world that were reviewed by a panel of experts under the chairmanship of Dr Mariano Sanz, Dean of the Dental School of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

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