

Expert panel headed by HKU Faculty of Dentistry proposes global agenda for gum disease research

A panel of internationally renowned dental experts chaired by Prof Li-jian Jin, from the HKU Faculty of Dentistry, has been commissioned by the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) to formulate a global “research agenda” related to gum diseases.

As noted by the IADR, there are many oral health disparities worldwide despite all the oral health research done so far. In particular, the global health burden attributable to oral diseases is still “unacceptably high”, the prevalence and severity of oral diseases vary both within and between countries, and oral health policies are lacking in many countries. In an attempt to tackle such oral health inequalities, the association launched an ambitious initiative in 2009, with the support of the World Health Organization and the World Dental Federation-FDI.

Called “Global Oral Health Inequalities: the Research Agenda” (GOHIRA), the IADR’s initiative brings together six Task Groups of international experts in dentistry and dental research. The expert panels are responsible for identifying inequalities and knowledge gaps in major areas of oral health (including tooth decay, gum disease, oral infections, oral cancer, and developmental abnormalities in the skull and face). They have also been tasked with drawing up a series of research agendas that could be implemented around the world and lead to “measurable improvements in global oral health within five years”.

The six-member expert panel responsible for proposing research programmes in gum (periodontal) health and disease is the IADR Periodontal Disease Task Group. This group is headed by [Prof Li-jian Jin](#) (Modern Dental Laboratory Professor in Clinical Dental Science, Professor in Periodontology, and Associate Dean for Research, Innovation, and Enterprise at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry) and also includes [Prof Niklaus Lang](#) (Professor in Implant Dentistry at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry) as well as experts from Europe and the USA.

According to this advisory group, gum diseases remain a major public health problem, and people are often unaware that they have a gum disease because the early stages of disease are usually painless. Furthermore, severe gum disease (periodontitis) leads to destruction of tooth-supporting tissues and the jawbone and is a main cause of tooth loss in adults worldwide.

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The IADR Periodontal Disease Task Group has now closely examined the unmet needs and fundamental knowledge gaps in its field, and has identified 12 key research areas that could eventually improve people's gum health worldwide. The projects in the proposed research agenda cover basic, translational, and applied research.

Examples of research topics are multicentre studies on the effectiveness of oral health care programmes aimed at preventing gum diseases; studies on the links between gum diseases and diseases affecting the rest of the body; and cross-cultural studies on socio-economic factors underlying inequalities related to gum health. Another important aim is research into the genetic basis for "complex disease traits in vulnerable populations" and how those genetic factors interact with environmental factors to influence how gum diseases start and progress.

Anticipating that the burden from gum diseases "could be relieved significantly in the near future through effective global teamwork", the Task Group calls for coordinated multinational efforts to undertake their suggested research programmes.

"Gum diseases are the most common disease in humans, according to the Guinness World Records, 2001," says Prof Jin. "We hope that the proposal from the Periodontal Disease Task Group will lead to significant improvements in global gum health, with defined and expected outcome measures."

The IADR Periodontal Disease Task Group and other task groups of the GOHIRA initiative published their recommended research agendas earlier this year in the IADR official journal *Advances in Dental Research*.

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Sources: Jin LJ, Armitage GC, Klinge B, Lang NP, Tonetti M, Williams RC. Global Oral Health Inequalities: Task Group—Periodontal Disease. *Adv Dent Res* 2011;23:221-226. Medline link: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21490234>

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The IADR is the largest non-government organisation in dental research, with more than 10,000 researchers worldwide. For more information about the IADR, visit www.iadr.org

For more information about the HKU Faculty of Dentistry, visit <http://facdent.hku.hk>

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