

# Meeting report: The 4<sup>th</sup> Iranian Congress of Community Oral Health

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The 4<sup>th</sup> Iranian Congress of Community Oral Health was held on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 in Mashhad, Iran under the theme of “Oral Health for All”. The congress brought together almost 300 Iranian dentists, including nearly 40 with a PhD in Community Oral Health, and 25 PhD students. This unprecedented large gathering of Iranian dentists, either specialists or dentists interested in community oral health, was one of the main characteristics of the meeting.

Thirty lectures and 66 posters were presented. A highly appreciated part of the congress was the recorded videos of Dr. Marco Peres, Dr. David W. Chambers, and Dr. Linda Slack-smith. Dr. Peres gave an overview of the Lancet Oral Health Series, launched in July 2019. The videos were recorded, subtitled in Persian and worked perfectly instead of live video conferencing.

Another special feature was the attendance of the main Iranian oral health policy-makers from the Ministry of Health and other influential public or private associations. There was a special session in the evening of the first day for these policy-makers to discuss the current situation, ongoing projects, and their vision of the way forward.

In the preceding week (23–27 November), a citywide campaign was run in Mashhad, the second largest city of Iran with almost three million residents. For five days, morning and evening, 163 volunteer undergraduates of the School of Dentistry, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, were involved in oral health education under the supervision of 5 Assistant professors of the School and 10 Community Oral Health PhD candidates from Shahid Beheshti and Tehran universities of Medical Sciences. Students were calibrated and coordinated on the educational content in two sessions in the week before. The campaign involved students attending 14

pre-determined stations around the city, such as busy subway stations, primary schools and public places in suburban areas to talk to people about their oral health. The focus was on tooth brushing and reducing the frequency of added sugar consumption. Moreover, thanks to Mashhad municipality, there were almost 50 billboards around the city with messages aimed at oral health promotion; such as (in informal Persian): “YOU HAVE HEALTHY TEETH if you brush your teeth twice a day.”, “YOU HAVE HEALTHY TEETH if you eat less sweets and chocolates.”, and “YOU HAVE HEALTHY TEETH if you stop smoking.” This campaign bridged the gap between lay people and dental students who can become used to working in isolated clinical settings. The students learned about communicating with people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, to talk with them in a simple but scientific way, and to listen patiently in order to give guidance on reducing barriers to oral health self-care. Although this strategy did not address the social determinants of health, these messages might hopefully work as nudges, in keeping with new findings in behavioral economics.

The congress was supported by The Iranian Association of Community Oral Health. The organizing team of the congress included Dr. Ali Kazemian (Congress President), Dr. Hooman Keshavarz (Head of the Scientific Committee), Dr. Saber Babazadeh (Head of the Executive Committee), and Dr. Hediyeht Toutouni (Chief Organizer of the Campaign).