

## Some holiday season thoughts about your dental health

### Dental tourism – the ADA warns ‘buyer beware’

With the Christmas and New Year season upon us the Australian Dental Association (ADA) considers it timely to again warn of the risks associated with the ‘overseas dental holiday’. Health (including dental) tourism is a growing industry and part of an increasing globalization of life. Flashy websites reveal picture-postcard locations such as Thailand, the Phillipines or India, together with claims of ‘safe, clean and very hygienic surgical procedures – just as you see in Australia, USA and UK’ – at promises of 60% savings, in a ‘top notch’ international hospital. Added to this are new publications on the market which are catering for a growing number of international health travelers that are visiting hospitals and clinics each year in countries other than their own.

Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President of the ADA, said, “For a reduced price and a holiday at the same time it seems like an offer you can’t ignore, too good to be true – but it isn’t always that good. Most people go overseas because they want fairly complex dentistry done, and the more complex it is the greater the likelihood that something will go wrong. And when it does go wrong it can do so in a big way.”

An increase in the number of Australians heading overseas for dental treatment has occurred in the past few years. “Obtaining dental treatment overseas can be risky to both your dental health and general health. There is potential for substandard treatment which may require extensive and costly repair procedures on return to Australia. A cheap overseas trip promising ‘an exotic holiday and smile makeover’ can lead to many complications in the long term if the work performed is not guaranteed or infection control standards are not up to scratch.”

Before contemplating or undertaking overseas dental treatment, Australians should be aware of the following:

- Many overseas dental practitioners would not be able to register as dentists in Australia, where dentists have to comply with high standards of practice and maintain high levels of professional competence.
- Infection control requirements for dentistry in Australia are of world best practice standards as dental treatment often involves surgery. Unfortunately, those of many overseas countries are far less rigorous.
- Receiving treatment in a foreign country may result in difficulty in having your needs understood.
- Dental treatment can’t often be appropriately fitted in around a holiday schedule as it needs to be conducted over a longer period of time and requires regular visits. Implants, for example, cannot be done properly over the week to 10 days of a holiday. Implants require treatment performed over a number of visits as the mouth needs to ‘settle’ between visits.
- Patients treated in Australia have many options of recourse if there are problems with dental treatment. Overseas treatment



leaves only costly options of recourse if the treatment fails. Often the treatment received has to be completely redone. If that happens patients will have to pay for another overseas treatment and the treatment’s rectification or have the work redone in Australia.

- Complications to health from elective dental treatment obtained overseas are not always covered by travel insurance and the treatments may not be covered by Australian health funds.
- Treatment done in Australia can more easily be fine-tuned before placement or corrected after completion.
- Treatment overseas can be cheaper initially than that received in Australia but be careful that you know exactly what you are getting; that it is suitable for your situation and that is of an appropriate standard. Dental patients in Australia receive world’s best standards.

### Take care with new presents

Parents are advised to:

- supervise young children with new presents such as bicycles to avoid falls and dental injuries;
- warn older children of injury risks with new presents such as skateboards and to wear a mouthguard for sports training; and
- if a tooth is knocked out replace it straight away or place it in food wrap or milk and seek dental treatment urgently. Always only handle the crown of the tooth.

### Don’t neglect good oral hygiene

During the holiday season one can be tempted to forget all about good oral hygiene. So the ADA reminds everyone to remember the following tips:

- Floss then brush your teeth at least twice a day (after meals) and use a fluoride toothpaste. This fights the decay process and helps the enamel to resist acid attack and also prevents gum disease.
- Watch your diet and limit your intake of sweet food and acidic drinks to mealtimes only, when you can follow up after an hour or so with flossing and toothbrushing to remove plaque and prevent acid attack.