

## GUEST EDITORIAL

**ORAL HEALTH RESEARCH - TIME TO ADDRESS THE RESEARCH CAPACITY ISSUE****Tasleem Akhtar**

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In developing countries including Pakistan, oral health remains low on the national health priorities list owing to it being considered not life threatening. The World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Oral Health Report 2003<sup>1</sup> was aimed at correcting this misconception. WHO recognizes oral health as an integral part of general health as they share common dietary, lifestyle and environmental risk factors and the solutions to control oral disease are to be found through shared approaches with integrated chronic disease prevention.

Inequitable access to health care is a major barrier to improving health, both general and oral. Evidence informed policies and implementation strategies are necessary for reducing health inequalities and achieving health goals. The WHO Oral Health Programme focuses on stimulating oral health research to reduce risk factors and the burden of oral disease, and to improve oral health systems and the effectiveness of community oral health programmes<sup>2</sup>. Public health and epidemiological research is recommended to identify modifiable common risk factors to oral health and chronic disease, psychosocial and socio-behavioural risk factors and implications for oral health; inequity in oral health and disease, the burden of oro-dental trauma and related risk factors etc; clinical research is needed to generate evidence in oral health care: clinical care and practice; translation of knowledge and translational research is necessary to build on and quicken the application of existing knowledge to improving patient care and health systems and operational research is imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of oral health systems and alternative community oral health programmes and to reorientate oral health services towards prevention and health promotion and to adjust programmes and services to systems needs<sup>3</sup>.

Inadequate research capacity is a major factor limiting oral health research, especially in developing countries. The siloed nature of dentistry and the limited number of dentists entering research further restrict the volume and quality of research undertaken. Capacity for health research is defined as 'an ability of individuals, organisations, or systems to perform and utilise health research effectively, efficiently, and sustainably<sup>4</sup>. Institutional support and appropriate training of researchers are the two inter dependent components of research capacity building. Currently strengthening research capacity in developing countries is heavily dependent upon external funding. This needs to change in Pakistan. Health research and health research capacity building must be institutionalized to enable the country's health system including the oral health system to respond more efficiently and effectively to the multiplying health challenges and double burden of diseases of the population. Health Academic Institutions have a special responsibility on this count since education, research and service are their recognized functions and determinants of their standing among peers nationally and internationally.

1. The World Oral Health Report 2003: Continuous improvement of oral health in the 21st century—the approach of the WHO Global Oral Health Programme. World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland
2. Petersen, P.E. and Kwan, S. Evaluation of community-based oral health promotion and oral disease prevention – WHO recommendations for improved evidence in public health practice. *Community Dental Health*. 2004; 21 (Supplement): 319–21.
3. Petersen PE. Priorities for research for oral health in the 21st century-the approach of the WHO Global Oral Health Programme. *Community Dent Health*. 2005; 22(2): 71-4.
4. Mahmood S, Hort K., Ahmed S., Salam M., and Cravioto A. Strategies for capacity building for health research in Bangladesh: Role of core funding and a common monitoring and evaluation framework. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 2011; 9:31 doi:10.1186/1478-4505-9-31