



# Dentistry in Australia

## TRIPLE START TO MODERN DENTISTRY

Records indicate that prior to European settlement in 1788, the indigenous Australians exhibited good oral health in the "hunter gatherer" communities. After the arrival of the early Dutch and English explorers and the subsequent colonisation of Sydney, three dentists migrated to Sydney and established dental practices in 1818.

## GOLD RUSH

Following the gold rush in the

1850s, there was a significant growth in the population of Australia, with its prosperity (and sugar intake) increasing markedly. By the turn of the century, 245 dentists practised in Sydney, with dental training courses being conducted and dental associations being formed. Equipment and materials arrived from SS White Company and the treatment

philosophies of WD Miller and GV Black were being observed.

## A NEW ERA

With the formation of the Federation in 1901, a new era began in Australian dentistry, seeing the introduction of a dental degree course at The University of Sydney. Numerous dental societies and associations amalgamated to form the Australian Dental

Association in 1928. An independent Australian Army Dental Corp was set up in 1943 and the Institute of Dental Research was founded in 1946.

## HALF CENTURY OF ADVANCES.

Between 1950 to 2000, there were extraordinary advances in training, practice and research in oral health care in Australia. Fluoridation of national water supplies commenced

in the early 1950s, which brought about a comprehensive change in the population's oral health status. This resulted in about 90% reduction in dental caries in schoolchildren and young adults and the subsequent reduction of dental treatment needs. Past dental caries experience in older adults remains at significant levels, with approximately 10% of the population being edentulous.

Since 1968, the water supplies of Sydney, together with 80% of New South Wales, have been fluoridated.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

In Australia:

- around 55% of the population regularly seek oral healthcare
- average of 2 visits each year
- utilisation rate greatest in children (5 to 14 years) and least in persons >65 years
- majority of dental services through private practice
- free government dental services for schoolchildren and persons who receive health benefits
- the number of practising dentists has increased significantly in the past three decades - there were 8,990 dentists in Australia in 2000
- National expenditure on oral



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- health services in 2001 was - \$AUD2.8 billion (5.5% of the total expenditure on health)
- Australia's GDP per capita in 2003 = \$9,060, with annual dental expenditure per capita at about \$140 - of which \$110 is through the private sector
- the national dentist:population ratio is 1:2,130 (with 2,400 dentists in Sydney)
- the number of female dentists has increased rapidly to 23%
- mean age of dentists is 43.3 years.

## A BURGEONING PROFESSION

There are five University dental schools in Australia, graduating approximately 220 new dentists each year, and a number of training institutions for dental prosthetists, dental technicians, dental hygienists, dental therapists and dental chairside assistants.

The state dental registration boards recognise graduates from dental schools of Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Ireland. Dentists with other overseas qualifications need to undertake Board Examinations for registration in Australia. Dentists with an initial overseas qualification comprise 14% of the dental workforce.

Australian dentists are extremely proud of the extraordinary achievements of their profession in the past century. They have ensured that the population, which they assiduously serve, has enjoyed the highest levels of oral health care in the world.