

# **Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders**

## **What We Are About**

Alliance for Oral Health across Borders was founded for the purpose of promoting peace and well-being through oral health in countries, regions, and communities in the world, particularly those facing social, economic, and political unrest. Using oral health as the path, members of the Alliance are committed, independently of any political agendas, to foster, create, and sustain collaborative relationships in order to bring about peace and harmony among people.

## **Who We Are**

The Alliance is a non-profit international non-governmental organization created by oral health care professionals and oral health advocates— dentists, dental educators, members of the oral health care team, business leaders, public servants, administrators, researchers, advocates and others – representing dozens of nationalities with the vision of achieving global peace and health through oral health by means of collaborative dialogue and action.

## **What We Want To Do**

Discussions and activities by Alliance members will focus on creating a supportive environment for harmonious relationships across cultures. Members of the Alliance believe that science, and specifically knowledge and expertise associated with oral health, can be the foundation for individual and community health and well-being, as well as enable communication among individuals, regardless of political allegiances, when governmental relations may be difficult. Science and health diplomacy can build bridges, helping to prepare and nurture protective environments for people living in conflict, post-conflict, or hostile areas to come together for a unified purpose of attaining and sustaining the health of populations.

Whether the specific goal is to improve overall health of communities, to remove health inequalities, or for oral health professionals living in different countries to explore resolutions for peaceful interactions, the intent of the Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders is to develop leadership and advocacy for the purpose of building human capacity to promote peace and well-being through oral health.

## **Guiding Principles**

Basic to the work of the Alliance is the overall guiding principle of ethical behavior and impartiality, respecting all racial, ethnic, religious, political, gender, and age characteristics of people everywhere. The Alliance is dedicated to the spirit of humanitarianism, having genuine concern for the lives of others and their improvement, and foster mutual understanding and respect for the human right to health, including oral health, for all. Within this context, members of the Alliance view oral health as an integral part of general health, with many of the risk factors shared with diseases affecting other body systems. The projects to be sponsored by the Alliance should promote health, prevent disease, and provide appropriate healthcare for populations in areas in conflict, war, or social or economic distress.

## **Initiatives**

- I. To inaugurate the concepts of the Alliance, plans have begun to: a) recruit additional dental school members; b) invite dentists and dental organizations in area of unrest or conflict or health crises to join the Alliance, and c) organize regional workshops to train ambassadors from dental schools and organizations to engage in dialogue on how to create an environment where tolerance and understanding of differences among members can be understood and respected, as well as to develop joint oral health educational and intervention projects to promote peace and understanding through oral health programs.
- II. Following the regional meetings, a conference of all members will be organized in 2014 to follow up on the regional workshops and bring the full membership together, as well as launch cross-regional oral health programs. The goal of the regional and full Alliance meetings will be to prepare leaders to work for health and peace through oral health initiatives, within their own countries and across borders. In the 2014 meeting, invitees will include oral health professionals from Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Iraq (Kurds, Shia, and Sunni), Israel (Israelis and Palestinians), Ivory Coast, North and South Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Burundi, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and other areas that have experienced hostility and strife.

Listening and reflection are the building blocks for understanding and respect of other humans. Sharing of human experiences builds bonds and connects people from diverse communities under shared human values. For dialogue to be successful, participants require skills to manage peer pressure, and to understand different cultures where understanding and recognition of others who disagree may not be welcomed. Leadership skills are important for the results of dialogue to take root and spread beyond those directly involved. At the Alliance conference, these two pathways – dialogue and leadership – will converge. Opportunities for training in leadership and negotiation skills will be provided and embedded in the context of discussions about oral health issues and their solutions. Leadership skills development will focus on positive engagement through communication, advocacy, and setting high ethical standards, and aspirations for peace. Participants will work together on oral health and health promotion projects that will take place during and after the conference. Projects will be developed by the participants to set the stage for future meetings where members of the Alliance will share experiences in achieving goals of promoting health and peace in their communities, and will continue to refine their skills in dialogue and leadership.

- III. The Alliance is beginning plans for a Young Ambassadors program under which oral health students and newly graduated professionals can serve as “Young Ambassadors”, extending the reach of the Alliance to greater numbers in the pursuit of peace. Focusing on the creation of career pathways in the oral health domain, young professionals can be the conduit for harmonious relationships as they grow, become educated, and mature into understanding, compassionate, caring oral health professionals, pursuing careers in education, research, clinical service delivery, and in other entrepreneurial or administrative roles.