IADR Applauds the Lancet Series on Oral Health, Addresses Commentary

The International Association for Dental Research (IADR) applauds the addition of *Oral Health* to the Series from the *Lancet* Journals. This two-part series is an excellent compilation of global epidemiologic data on the health and economic burden of oral diseases, the social and commercial determinants of oral diseases, and the neglect of oral diseases in larger global health policies. This *Lancet* series provides a superb advocacy tool to advance the imperative that oral diseases must be addressed as part of primary health care and universal health coverage along with other non-communicable diseases.

The IADR agrees with the recommendations to advance research agendas reflected in the second part of the series. Recognizing that “research focusing on oral diseases is often given low priority by research funding agencies,” the IADR launched an IADR Advocacy Toolkit to assist our Divisions around the world in promoting oral health research. IADR and our U.S. Division, the American Association for Dental Research (AADR), are proud to advocate for increased research funding for oral health research and have seen evidence of success with increased budgets at the U.S. National Institutes of Health and other institutes and agencies. The *Lancet* Series on Oral Health will be an important addition to the IADR Advocacy Toolkit.

The *Lancet* series also recommends that “based on experience gained from tobacco control, dental professional organizations . . . should not accept any funding, sponsorship, or support from the sugar industry.” And in an accompanying commentary, Kearns and Bero call for reform on how conflicts of interest are managed between the sugar-containing food and beverage industry and dental research organizations. IADR was specifically mentioned regarding the corporate membership of two companies with oral care products that also sell sugar-containing foods and beverages. IADR’s main point of contact for both of these companies is through their oral care products and the company divisions with a commitment to primary prevention. One company develops and sells fluoridated toothpastes and other preventive products needed in population-wide upstream approaches called for in the *Lancet* series.

As noted in the commentary, the perceived conflict of interest is that there is a bias about the research agenda and how research is designed, conducted, and published. However, the IADR does not have a specific research agenda which could be influenced by any corporate interests. As a membership-based association, IADR’s Mission is to drive dental, oral and craniofacial research to advance health and well-being worldwide. IADR provides a global forum for the exchange of scientific knowledge through meetings, publications and membership. Other than a few awards and fellowship, IADR is not a major funder of research. IADR members obtain their funding from government research agencies, universities, philanthropic sources, and industry.
The 2009 U.S. Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) publication “Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice” referenced in the commentary is also primarily focused on institutions that conduct medical research and education, clinical care and clinical practice guideline development. These conflict of interest policies are not directly applicable to a membership-based association like IADR, but certainly provide guidance to our member institutions.

Among IADR members are scientists from oral care companies. These scientists are at the forefront of developing and commercializing cost-effective products that are vital for population-wide approaches. IADR is engaged with these scientists and their companies to facilitate the further development of such products. While conflicts of interest need to be carefully managed, public-private partnerships can attain global health goals that neither sector can achieve alone or will at least be significantly delayed without the involvement of both sectors. A blanket rejection of corporate sponsorship, even with strong conflicts of interest policies in place, could stifle research and health innovations.

IADR does take conflicts of interest and perceived conflicts of interest seriously, which is why it requires all presenters and authors to provide a disclosure statement prior to presentations and in publications.

IADR and AADR are proud of their leadership position in managing corporate relationships and in tackling the sugar-sweetened beverage industry:

- The IADR Corporate Sponsorship Policy clearly defines the relationship between corporate sponsors and the IADR regarding support for the IADR General Session and other IADR activities such as awards, fellowships and grant programs. The policy applies to all IADR Divisions and Scientific Groups and Networks.
- The IADR and AADR divested sugar-sweetened beverage companies from their investment portfolios and calls on other associations and institutions to do the same.
- The IADR and AADR Healthy Meetings Policy was implemented to provide a guide that encompasses nutrition, tobacco-free space, physical activity and sustainability at IADR meetings.

“Working with the oral care commercial community to inform research and its translation is important for the advancement of health and well-being worldwide,” said IADR President Paula Moynihan, University of Adelaide, Australia. “We value our relationships with our sponsors and our sponsors have no influence over our scientific programme, recipients of awards or other initiatives of the organization. That being said, as an organization that values scientific excellence and social responsibility, we are always open to constructive critiques from key stakeholders and will review our current policies for any needed updates.”

International Association for Dental Research
The International Association for Dental Research (IADR) is a nonprofit organization with over 11,400 individual members worldwide, with a Mission to drive dental, oral and craniofacial research to advance health and well-being worldwide. To learn more, visit www.iadr.org. The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) is the largest Division of IADR with 3,300 members in the United States. To learn more, visit www.iadr.org/aadr.