

Growing Culture of Illegal Dentistry Globally, Including Malaysia. Calling for Multidisciplinary Action for Patient Safety

Malezya Da Dahil Olmak Üzere Küresel Olarak Artan Yasadışı Dişhekimliği Kültürünün Hasta Güvenliği Açısından Azaltılmasında Multidisipliner Eylem Çağrısı

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Abstract

Illegal dentistry is a term used to describe any dental procedures done by bogus, unqualified dentists who perform various dental procedures without proper educational background. The issues of illegal dentistry had gone worldwide; not only involving the emerging of illegal practitioners but also raises concerns over the authenticity of dental equipment being used and available in the global market. This necessitates the interaction between the professions, public and dental suppliers. A qualified dentists is strictly recommended to continuously liaise with licensed dental dealers in order to get a constant supply of genuine dental products and equipment for their clinics. In Malaysia, a well-trained, qualified dentist is required to register to ensure they are committed in ensuring a professional, safe, high quality and ethical dental practice. The public must be able to identify the authenticity of a practitioner's academic claims by examining their practice and checking whether they are registered to ensure they all possess a license in good standing and that their educational claims are authentic.

Keywords illegal; fake; dentistry; Malaysia; dental; and practitioner

Özet

Yasadışı diş hekimliği, uygun eğitim geçmişli olmadan çeşitli diş işlemleri yapan sahte, vasıfsız dişhekimleri tarafından yapılan diş işlemlerini tanımlamak için kullanılan bir terimdir. Yasadışı dişhekimliği sorunları dünya çapında yaşanmıştır; Sadece yasadışı uygulayıcıların ortaya çıkmasını sağlamakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda küresel pazarda kullanılmakta ve kullanılmakta olan diş ekipmanlarının gerçekliğine dair endişeleri de beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu meslekler, halk ve diş tedarikçileri arasındaki etkileşimi gerektirir. Kalifiye bir dişhekiminin, kliniklerinde sürekli gerçek bir dişhekimliği ürün ve ekipmanı temin etmek için sürekli olarak lisanslı dişhekimliği satıcılarıyla irtibat kurması tavsiye edilir. Malezya'da, iyi eğitilmiş, nitelikli bir diş hekiminin profesyonel, güvenli, kaliteli ve etik bir diş hekimliği uygulaması sağlama taahhüdünde olmalarını sağlamak için kayıt yaptırılmaları gerekir. Halk, bir uygulayıcının akademik iddialarının doğruluğunu, uygulamalarını inceleyerek ve hepsinin iyi bir lisansa sahip olmalarını sağlamak için kayıtlı olup olmadıklarını ve eğitim taleplerinin gerçek olup olmadıklarını kontrol ederek tespit edebilmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

yasadışı; sahte; sağlık; Malezya; diş; ve uygulayıcı

INTRODUCTION

Illegal dentistry is a term used to describe any dental procedures done by a bogus dentist, using a counterfeit dental device^{1,2}. In Malaysia, illegal dentistry is also known as fake dentistry. Any individual conducting dental procedures, such as placing or fixing braces, making false teeth or bridge, scaling, and teeth whitening, without proper educational background are considered as a illegal or fake dentist¹.

Accredited and Qualified Malaysian Dentists

In Malaysia, a well-trained and qualified dentist must register under Malaysian Dental Council (MDC), and he or she must obtain an Annual Practicing Certificate, in order for him or her to practice dentistry legally in the country¹. The MDC is committed to ensuring a professional, safe, high quality and ethical dental practice and its mission is to control and ensure that only qualified practitioners are allowed to practice in Malaysia with a valid practicing certificate³. He or she must also have an authentic academic certification, specifically a degree in dentistry from a recognized university. Prospective dentists also need to attend the post-qualification exam as stipulated in the recent Dental Act 2018⁴. The Malaysian Dental Register comprises two separate lists, one for Division I Practitioners (Dental surgeons) and a second for Division II Practitioners (Registered dentists)⁵. Division II Practitioners are those who were trained through an apprenticeship system in the years before and after World War 2. They were allowed to practice due to a shortage of qualified professionals. However, following the enactment of the Dental Act 1971, the Division II Register was subsequently closed in 1972. Some of these trained but unqualified dentists were registered prior to 1972 and are still practising till today. As expected, the numbers have decreased over the years and other unqualified dentists not in the list are considered as fake dentists⁵. In 2016, there were only 24 Division II Practitioners in Malaysia⁶.

In Malaysia, all dental faculties offer five-year degree

undergraduate dental programme. In this new and challenging environment, better planning, commission and delivery of education and training have been increasingly recognized as crucial policy issues. In a drive to produce a quality future dental workforce, it is essential that dentist must be trained according to current needs and technology⁷⁻⁹ to be appropriately equipped with the skills, knowledge and competencies to deliver quality dental service⁸. Along with the advancement of dental science and technology, dental students' life-long learning skills has been inculcated to ensure dental graduates are up-to-date with the current knowledge and technology innovations. Moreover, dentists at local market are also required to update themselves with numerous courses and workshop post-studies⁴. It is also claimed that the content of the Malaysian curriculum is similar to the one in the UK¹⁰ as most current lecturers and dental specialists in Malaysia were trained in the UK and Ireland¹¹. This makes the Malaysian system similar and as respected as most countries. Therefore, public could feel safe to be treated by the real and not illegal dentist without worrying. Currently, the issues of illegal dentistry had gone global. Cases of fake dentistry do not only involved practitioners but also the use of unregulated dental equipment. These issues will be discussed according to the action needed as presented by three different stakeholders to prevent the growing culture of fake in dentistry as presented in the Figure 1.

Profession	Public	Dental Supplier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obey to the country's Act & Regulation Strengthened enforcement activities Purchase and use real and not the fake instrument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn to spot real vs. illegal dental practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide real and established instrument Do not supply instrument/ material to so called illegal dentist

Figure 1 Collaborative action across three different stakeholders to prevent the growing culture of illegal in dentistry.

Governance of the Dental Profession

In regard to practitioners, Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act (PHFSA) 1998 controls various aspects related to management of any dental premises registered under the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH)¹². MOH officers will arrange a thorough inspection towards all dental clinics owned by a qualified dentist or dental practitioner, in order to maintain their quality and services to patients. Once the dental clinics fulfilled all MOH and PHFSA 1998 requirements, then only the clinic can be officially registered under MOH¹². In Malaysia, a number of illegal dentists were caught by the authorities and they are faced with penalties as well as imprisonment of not more than 6 years¹³.

Role of Dental Suppliers

On the other hand, a huge amount of fake dental equipment had been hauling the United Kingdom every year 14. It is believed that most of the counterfeit items are imported from Mainland China¹⁴. There are nearly 75 companies registered as dental dealers and suppliers of dental products in Malaysia¹⁵. Under the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 1998 and the Medical Act 1971, all medical and dental products supplied by the companies must be registered¹². They are only allowed to sell genuine products to real practitioners and not to illegal practitioners or else, they will face penalties^{12,15}. However, most of the unregistered dental dealers are from the overseas, mainly from China. Due to the growth of e-commerce platforms, such as Lazada, Shopee, AliBaba and many more, there is less control on either the dealers are licensed, unregistered dental dealers are able to sell fake dental equipment at a cheaper price to fake dentists. Therefore, authorities should come out with better solutions to overcome these issues, in order to control the supply of fake products, from unlicensed dealers to illegal dentist. In the meantime, qualified dentists in Malaysia will and should continuously liaise with licensed dental dealers so that they can get a constant supply of genuine dental products and equipment for their clinics. On the contrary, someone who

is practising illegal dentistry, do not undergo any formal education on dentistry (5 to 6 years of dental training in recognized universities) and will skip all these procedures which could cause great may harm to other people¹³.

Public Awareness and Responsibilities

The emergence of unlicensed, illegal dentists globally has contributed to more dental problems instead of improving dental health. Hence, consumers or the public are advised to avoid any dental treatment from someone who offers pricing that appears to be too good to be true. It can be argued that illegal dentists offer cheaper services compared to real, legal dentists and this makes them more appealing to patients. However, the treatment provided is substandard in order to provide dental services to their customers, these illegal dentists often use hotel rooms, homestay, beauty salon or motels as a makeshift 'clinic' to avoid being caught by the authorities¹³. They do not have any registered permanent clinics and do not have any proper dental chairs or equipment during treatment^{2,13}. Hence, the public is advised that if they encounter such situation during dental visits, chances are they are being treated by illegal dentist. These patients might be exposed to a higher risk of infectious disease as the equipment used by illegal dentists might not be sterilised. Furthermore, these illegal dentists may not be able to treat any complications and patients may incur a higher cost of treatment for the complications that might be caused by bogus dental treatments. The public should ensure that they receive treatment from registered dentists who are listed in the Dental Practitioner Information Management System (DPIMS) that can be accessed through its website. This is to ensure that the dentists are licensed in good standing and their educational claims are authentic.

Summary

Collaboration between the ministries, dental professionals, enforcement officers, registered dental dealers and the public is important in order to combat this issue. Apart from these team, social media may also help in public ed-

ucation and awareness. By effective communication and teamwork, we will be able to ensure the success in containing the growth of illegal dentistry in Malaysia.

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