Preface

This supplement is based on papers presented at the Second International Conference of the Faculty of Dentistry, Kuwait University, October 2–4, 2001. The conference provided an ideal opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss new developments in the field of dentistry, especially the latest trends in the evidence-based approach to dental care. As the former President of Kuwait University, Professor Faiza M. Al-Khorafi, stated in her opening remarks, ‘In science, we need to question continuously, *what is the evidence?* We look to science for answers, but quite often science can only give us the best estimate for probabilities. Our research results need continuous re-evaluation, and the evidence must be weighed according to the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific methods applied.’

The evidence-based approach has been widely discussed in various healthcare fields and has influenced teaching throughout the world. With its emphasis on prevention and its use of previous, analogous evidence to design treatment plans, the evidence-based approach differs fundamentally from traditional methods of intervention, which focus on clinical outcomes. The stages of the approach, including the synthesis and assessment of evidence, the application of that evidence to a particular case, and finally the monitoring and reassessment of the intervention, are presented in detail in this supplement. The preventive aspect of this approach is also addressed in an article that re-evaluates traditional approaches to the restoration of carious teeth, which give rise to the ‘repeat restoration cycle’ and in fact mask the underlying disease process rather than prevent its occurrence. The prevention of oral diseases caused by smoking is empha-

sized in a review of the documented harmful effects of smoking on oral health; it is proposed that dentists should make time during office visits to counsel patients on these effects and guide them through smoking cessation programs.

As research in the field of dentistry develops and expands and the evidence-based approach gains widespread acceptance, traditional treatments are steadily giving way to new strategies of managing oral health issues. A clear move away from tradition is discussed in an article devoted to treatment planning for older, partially dentate patients. It is proposed that the usual method of total tooth replacement is not necessary, and the targeted ‘shortened dental arch’ is more effective and gives a high level of patient satisfaction. Exciting new research on stem cells and tissue regeneration indicate a distant but hopeful possibility to grow new teeth to solve the ever-present problems of dental caries and periodontal disease.

The second theme of the conference was ‘The Development of Dental Education and Oral Health,’ with a regional emphasis. The dental curricula of schools in two Gulf countries, Kuwait and Iran, are presented in this supplement, as is the issue of community health in Africa. The dental curriculum at Kuwait University’s newly established Faculty of Dentistry aims to promote oral health in Kuwait through education, research and community involvement. It incorporates recent trends in healthcare, including the evidence-based approach which has become an important component of comprehensive dental care clinical work. In Iran, many new dental schools have been established over the past 20 years, offering both under-

graduate and postgraduate training programs. The number of dentists and specialists in Iran is steadily increasing, and just recently dental services have been incorporated into the public healthcare system. Efforts are also underway in Africa to integrate oral health programs into general health services, through the technical and financial support of WHO/AFRO. It is hoped that such preventive programs and new intervention strategies will improve the level of oral health in many African countries.

As reflected in the presentations at this conference, the vibrant research activity in the field of dentistry and the efflorescence in dental education and oral health promotion promise continued improvements in both dental healthcare delivery and patients' quality of life in the coming years. It was an honor for the Faculty of Dentistry at Kuwait University to host this conference and welcome

professionals and researchers from around the world, and we look forward to another successful conference in December, 2003.

We would like to express the Conference Organising Committee's gratitude to Kuwait University for its continued support of our conferences, and the Advanced Technology Company for the financial support of this conference. We are also indebted to the *Medical Principles and Practice* Editor-in-Chief, Professor Farida Al-Awadi, and Editor, Professor Azu Owunwanne, for their help, strong support and commitment to publish this supplement. Lastly, we would like to personally thank the authors for their participation, contributions and cooperation.

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