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A Brief Visit to Chiang Mai: Oral Public Health in Action in Northern Thailand

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A Brief Visit to Chiang Mai: Oral Public Health in Action in Northern Thailand

Abstract

Thailand has become well-known in Asia for its innovative public health programs and has also made significant strides towards improving oral health. The Thai approach to providing accessible healthcare for all its citizens could serve as a potential model for other countries throughout Southeast Asia. Based on a 3 week visit to shadow a practicing public health dentist, I was able to gain an insight into how their universal healthcare system functions – both its successes and challenges. Brief interactions with 20 patients who were receiving oral care helped put a face to the system and provided an additional perspective on the oral health issues facing people in rural areas. Problems specific to oral health included missing teeth, and severe caries – problems which were directly related to other serious health issues such as malnutrition. Observations showed that, despite limited resources, under-served populations have begun to receive the care they critically need. The efficient use of both finances and manpower to provide healthcare in even the remotest parts of the country could serve as an example to other communities facing similar healthcare challenges. Relevant background information on dentistry in Thailand as well as the specific oral health care issues I encountered will be presented in the poster.

Keywords

dentist, rural health, dental health, healthcare challenges

Disciplines

Dental Public Health and Education | Public Health



A Brief Visit to Chiang Mai: Oral Public Health in Action in Northern Thailand



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Introduction

- Thailand has made significant strides towards improving oral public health.
- Outreach programs focusing on oral health are especially vital for underserved populations.

Background

UNIVERSAL COVERAGE

- Annual funding per capita: 10 Baht for dental care (~30 cents)

ACCESSIBILITY

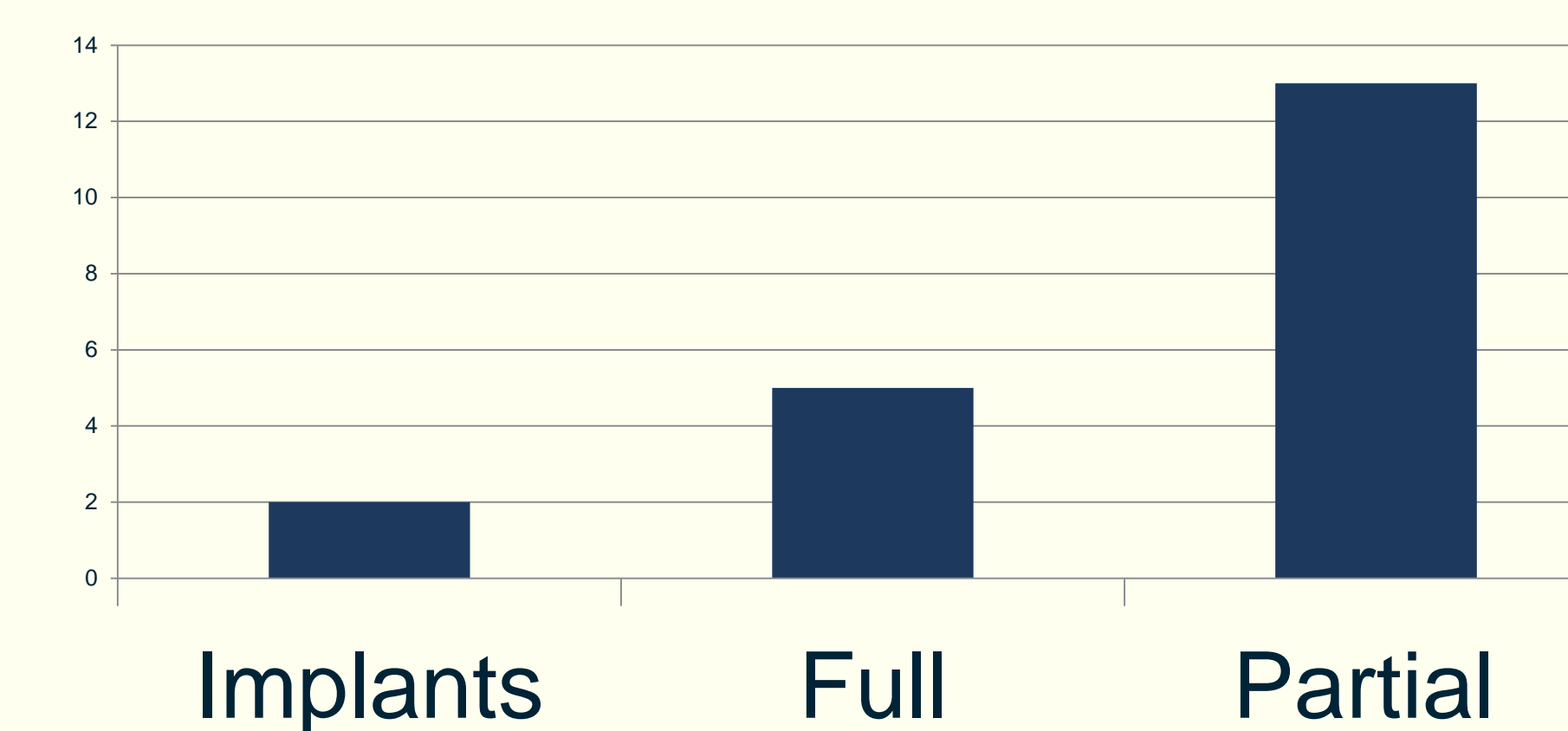
- Total Population: 67 million
- 43 million (~65%) in rural areas
- 3-tiered system:
 - Sub-district - Small local clinics. Clinics serving > 10,000 people have one dedicated dental nurse (2 year degree, simple procedures)
 - District - Small hospitals with on staff dentists (who make sub-district clinic visits once a month)
 - Province - Large hospitals with surgeons and dental specialists
- Medical charts are organized by family to efficiently track community members

Methods

- Shadowed a public health dentist for 3 weeks in rural Northern Thailand
- Interacted with 20 patients receiving oral care at the Chai Sathan Sub-district Community Clinic
- Participants were all in the senior outreach free denture / implant program.
- Average Age of Participants: 74

Results

- All patients were missing critical upper or lower molars, usually both.
- 10% needed molar implants, 25% needed full upper and lower denture, 65% needed upper or lower partial dentures



Participants



Discussion

Dental health challenges & solutions

- **EDUCATION:** Community classes on basic oral hygiene
- **NUTRITION:** Research shows a statistical association between the number of natural teeth and below average weight in Thai older people.
- **LOW QUALITY PROSTHETICS:** Oral health problems have been aggravated by ill fitting, low quality prosthetics made outside of a lab by salesmen lacking proper training in dental prosthetics.
- **PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS:** Some seniors have difficulty grasping the small handle of a toothbrush.

Pictured:
A simple solution



Conclusion

- Despite limited resources, healthcare has become accessible in rural areas due to efficient use of manpower
- Thailand can serve as an example to other communities facing similar healthcare challenges.