Foreword

At the global level, marked changes in oral disease patterns have been observed over the past decades. In several industrialised countries the adult population maintain functional dentitions and significant reductions in rates of edentulousness are noted. Furthermore, the prevalence and the severity of dental caries have declined substantially in those countries and the trend parallels the implementation of preventive oral care programmes and changing living conditions and lifestyles. For countries of other regions, the trend over-time in oral disease prevalence is not particularly clear. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, dental caries prevalence rates among children are high for some countries whereas other countries show lower levels of dental caries; the pattern significantly reflects the distinct lifestyles in health, the level of exposure to fluorides and development of oral health systems. In Africa, contrasting disease trends are revealed depending on country, population groups and socio-economic conditions. In this region, particular attention should be given to the negative implications to health of changing diet, nutrition and unhealthy lifestyles related to tobacco use, and the severe problems emerging from HIV/AIDS. In addition to lack of systematic data on oral disease frequency of adults the information on oral manifestations of HIV/AIDS is poor.

The World Health Organisation co-sponsored the meeting in Kuwait, 2–4 December 2003 on ‘Oral health in the Eastern Mediterranean and the African Regions’. The updated information on the oral health situation in the two regions not only may serve the planning and implementation of national oral health programmes but also the analysis may provide for identification of the needs for public health research in the future. Such research should be based on application of the broad concept of oral health, quality of life perspectives and the common risk factors approach for promoting oral health and general health. The WHO Oral Health Programme will contribute to the translation of public health research into action programmes, jointly with partners in countries and the newly established African and Middle East IADR Federation (AMEF).

Dr Poul Erik Petersen
Chief, Oral Health Programme
World Health Organisation, Geneva, Switzerland