

**Sue Dasler
Senior Advisor
Oral Health
Ministry of Health**

A New Era for an Iconic Service

In 2007, 43% of preschoolers and 59% of adolescents utilised oral health services. Five year old children had on average 2.31 teeth decayed missed or filled and 51% had no signs of dental caries. Year 8 children had, on average 1.53 teeth decayed, missing or filled and 47% had no signs of dental caries. About 135,000 enrolled children were over-due for their scheduled examination.

Half of all schools (45%) had a dental clinic on the school ground. These clinics were open on average 60 days in every year, and for the remainder of the time there was no service on site – the closed clinics gave a perception of ‘no’ service.

Technological progress meant services weren’t what they used to be. They have become more advanced and require a multidisciplinary team approach to deliver care. Keeping a network of clinics and equipment ticking over has become more difficult, expensive and the delivery of effective services from such out dated facilities is no longer viable.

The workforce is changing rapidly, the sector has difficulties attracting staff in rural and remote areas, the post-war baby boomers are due to enter retirement and the dual degree graduates have entered the market.

The discussion will cover the reinvestment in child and adolescent oral health services, the objectives, challenges and achievements to date. The ‘new look’ service will focus on increasing utilisation of services by preschoolers and adolescents, improving access in high needs areas, and on early enrolment and preventive care. This will require parents/caregivers to take an active part in managing oral health care for their children.

Sue shares the School Dental Service story, from horses to Mercedes, sterilisers to autoclaves, bumble bees to wrist bands, sole operators to multidisciplinary teams – a journey of evolution – a change for the better.