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UK P&I Club advises on the importance of dental hygiene in seafarers

Sophia Bullard, Crew Health Programme Director at UK P&I Club, discusses the importance of dental hygiene and advises on how it can be maintained.

“Dental problems can be a major cause for concern amongst seafarers. We often see claims arising from dental problems that require urgent medical treatment and even repatriation of crew. On an individual basis these claims may not in the higher claim cost bracket, however, they often result in repatriation of crew, which has a further impact on the safe manning of the ship and other delays to ship operation.

“Seafarers are frequently at sea for long periods of time and are therefore unable to attend regular dental check ups ashore; this may lead to dental problems developing unchecked.

“Long working hours and minimal physical exercise can result in the excessive consumption of highly caffeinated and very sugary drinks, unhealthy snacking and high levels of nicotine inhalation. In these circumstances, if oral health is neglected, gum disease, tooth decay and toothache can readily occur.

“Toothache, whether mild or severe, may be further aggravated without surgical intervention. Onboard most ships there will only be pain relief treatment available, which will give short-term relief but will not fix the underlying problem. This can have a detrimental effect on the seafarers’ performance, concentration and wellbeing, not to mention a significant impact on sleep, eating and other daily activities.

“Symptoms of periodontal disease are seldom noticed until the disease is at an advanced stage. These symptoms include persistent bad breath, swollen gums, bleeding or tender gums, painful chewing and loose or sensitive teeth.

“Good dental hygiene is extremely important to ensure your teeth are not at risk. Effective cleaning removes dental plaque and tartar from the teeth, preventing cavities, gingivitis, gum disease, tooth decay and periodontal disease.

Encouraging and reminding seafarers to take the correct steps to avoid dental problems will not only ensure their own wellbeing, but will also reduce costs for members, and will improve the safety of the ship by helping to maintain a full complement of crew.”

- **End** -

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Notes to Editors

UK P&I

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