Evolution of the toothfairy

By Ken Munkens and Kristin Kenyon

Remember when you were little and you lost a baby tooth? The toothfairy was very real to you then, an airy apparition who visited you overnight and left something wonderful under your pillow.

Some people believe they’ve outgrown the toothfairy, that she has become obsolete. Not so fast: the toothfairy has evolved into someone we can all believe in.

Today’s toothfairy has transitioned from simply rewarding children for their lost teeth to a very important role of helping children retain their permanent teeth, have beautiful smiles and enjoy healthier lives.

This little mystical icon has become a dedicated champion in the fight against the No. 1 chronic childhood illness in our country: pediatric dental disease.

Now a revolutionary Superhero armed with a powerful message, she is not just any toothfairy; she is America’s toothfairy.

For many years caring dental professionals, including pediatric dentists, dental hygienists and other health-care groups, have worked tirelessly to bring dental treatment and preventive therapies to underserved children.

Despite their efforts, however, pediatric dental disease continues to increase in America, causing pain and suffering for millions of children.

Dental disease affects us all
Children with untreated dental disease may find it difficult to eat, sleep and speak clearly, which affects their ability to concentrate in school, make friends and develop the social skills necessary to be successful adults.

It is a progressive disease, and children’s suffering worsens as they get older. They can experience chronic pain, and they can face gum disease, broken or lost teeth, abscesses, infections and even risk of death.

Until recently there was little emphasis on the connection between the mouth and a person’s overall health. Studies are now widely available that link tooth decay to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, pneumonia, poor pregnancy outcomes, secondary infections and dementia. But that is only part of the inherent risk. There is also a logical progression associated with this disease.

A child experiencing mouth pain may have difficulty eating a balanced diet with foods such as vegetables and grains, which are notoriously harder to chew.

Additionally, a child suffering from pediatric dental disease is often not able to chew properly or long enough to promote good digestion, resulting in the loss of valuable nutrients.

Malnutrition because of dental complications ultimately leads to poor growth development, weakened bones and muscles, allergies, inability to concentrate, emotional problems and other systemic health ailments not immediately recognized as being linked to tooth decay.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 51 million school hours and 164 million hours of work are lost each year due to dental related absences.

The number of Americans without dental insurance is almost three times the number of those lacking medical coverage, and uninsured
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children are two and a half times less likely than insured children to receive dental care. When these neglected mouths finally demand attention it is often through emergency room treatment, costing taxpayers millions of dollars each year for a disease that is largely preventable.

Information released by the Coalition on Oral Health Care estimates that for every $1 spent on oral health preventive measures, as much as $50 is saved in emergency and restorative treatment expenditures.

Overall higher health-care costs and insurance premiums, lower productivity levels of the workforce and even costs related to an elevated crime rate are a price we all pay when children with dental pain go untreated.

It’s easy to see the need for a certain kind of magic to fight pediatric dental disease. Fortunately, the toothfairy has evolved into America’s toothfairy and she is coming to the rescue.

America’s toothfairy: delivering hope

The National Children’s Oral Health Foundation is America’s toothfairy, a non-profit organization solely focused on eliminating America’s most common chronic childhood illness — pediatric dental disease — through comprehensive treatment and preventive and educational initiatives.

America’s toothfairy (www.americastoothfairy.org) serves as a national resource for health-care professionals and individuals alike, whether they are currently working to combat this devastating and preventable disease or looking to join the fight.

The organization raises public awareness of pediatric dental disease and the lifelong health complications associated with it, while supporting an affiliate network of non-profit oral health programs providing comprehensive care to underserved children across America.

In less than four years, America’s toothfairy has delivered more than $6 million in valuable product contributions and direct funding to affiliate partners, touching the lives of more than 1 million children nationwide! Because generous corporate underwriters cover all operational expenses, every additional dollar contributed to America’s toothfairy is allocated to programs giving children a healthier future.

The toothfairy has long been a symbol of the magic of childhood, a mystical figure only materializing as a child lay peacefully asleep, dreaming of the gifts to be found under his or her pillow the next morning.

Over 4 million children in America are suffering right now from oral pain so severe it keeps them up at night. For those children, and for anyone concerned with the healthy growth and development of our nation’s most valuable resource, National Children’s Oral Health Foundation has created America’s toothfairy.

She is a symbol of change: an educator, preventer, protector and, perhaps most importantly, a source of hope for children everywhere. Is America’s toothfairy real? She is as real as we make her.

For more information or to make a contribution, call (704) 350-1600 or visit www.americastoothfairy.org.