

# PROMOTING PEDIATRIC ORAL HEALTH

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# IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HEALTH

- Maintaining proper mouth care is essential to the health and development of children of all ages and is often taken for granted.
- Improper management of dental hygiene can lead to various conditions, such as tooth decay, periodontal disease, and even oral cancer.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood on the United States” (Centers for Disease Control, 2014).
- Tooth decay is greatly preventable and can be managed through healthier lifestyles.

## DEFINITION

- Dental caries are cavities caused by an accumulation of bacteria leading to tooth decay, and prevention requires healthy dental habits and avoidance of certain foods and drinks (Healthy People 2020, 2014).
- The prevalence has increased the last decade and is “four times more common than asthma among adolescents aged fourteen to seventeen years” (CDC, 2014).

## CAUSES

- One of the main leading causes of dental decay in children is their diet consumption. Many beverages and foods, such as juice drinks, soft drinks, and candy contribute to the formation of dental caries (American Dental Association, 2014).
- A lack of education is also a major cause and all too often the parents or guardians are seeking dental care for their children after dental disparities have already become an issue.
- CDC states the populations most prone to oral health disparities are Non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and Alaskan Natives (CDC, 2014).
- Lack of access to care and an inability to attain dental insurance are a couple of examples that many families of low socioeconomic status must face, therefore making prevention a difficult goal to achieve (Guarnizo-Herreño & Wehba, 2014).

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- The implementation of the project took place at Enterprise Children's Center, where it was determined there was a great need for education regarding the promotion of dental health.
- Many of the school-aged children already had dental work done from previous issues with tooth decay, and had multiple teeth covered with silver caps from where they had cavities.
- The root of the problem stems from a lack of education of the children, but also the parents.
- The project was promoted in hopes of an acknowledgment and understanding from both populations.

## PROJECT DESIGN & DELIVERY

- To promote the project, an educational brochure on the importance of dental health was distributed to the patients and their guardians.
- The brochure consisted of background information on teeth, instructions of proper brushing, complications from inadequate care, and a diet to promote healthy choices to prevent further tooth decay.
- The patients seen were school-aged and their ages ranged from 3-18 years.
- After the patients were seen for their initial complaint, the project leader spent close to 5 minutes explaining the importance of dental health and inquired about their current dental routine.
- If the patient had not been to the dentist a referral was given to the parents/guardians.

# PROJECT THEORIST

- The theory that was the most influential throughout the project was that of Dorothea Orem on her concept of self-care.
- One of the nursing actions Orem recommends is “assistance in helping patient and family assume continuing self-care” (Younas, 2017).
- Most children are “busy bodies” and do not consider hygiene a priority; therefore, reinforcement and teaching from the parents/guardians is crucial in their health.
- Orem’s theory is a major advocate for the promotion of self-care and for this project the goal is to encourage the patient to be an active participant in their care.

# EVALUATION

- A total of 26 patients were given mini educational sessions.
- 16 patients had seen a dentist within the last year. 7/16 patients had evident dental work from previous tooth decay. The 10 patients that had not seen a dentist were given a dental referral. 6/10 were beginning to show signs of tooth decay and were highly encouraged to see a dentist at their earliest convenience.
- At the end of the session, a short evaluation consisting of three questions was given to the parents/guardians. The questions asked whether the project leader was effective in presenting the information, if they would recommend the brochure to others, and if they found any information on the brochure that would change their children's dental habits for the better.
- All the responses from the evaluation forms were positive, and the staff at Enterprise Children's Center has discussed the use of the brochures for future patients.



# CONCLUSION

- Dental health is an important part of care and unfortunately is not taken seriously in all ages, especially in children. Neglecting oral care at a young age can lead to other health problems, even into adulthood, that could have been otherwise prevented.
- The purpose of the project was to educate and promote the importance of dental hygiene in children.
- For the future, I would recommend a follow-up phone call 1 month after the session to each of the families that were given a referral to see a dentist.
- Dental health is imperative to the rest of the body and education for its maintenance should begin at a young age to prevent further complications.

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