

Oral health education for community nurses: Identified need for further training

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Introduction and Aim: Oral health knowledge is fundamental to ensure nurses are able to achieve holistic patient care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, dentists were redeployed to community nursing teams to support wider healthcare service demands, where oral health knowledge deficits were observed.

Community nursing teams often care for vulnerable medically compromised patient groups who have increased oral health needs, including oncology, palliative and diabetic patients.

Methods: Smart Survey electronic training needs analysis distribution to all non-dental staff across Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BCHC).

Inclusion: Undertaken a patient facing role within the last month Current employee. No previous formal dental qualification.

Results:

1. Participant Demographics
2. Previous Exposure
 - 91 (68%) had no previous oral health training
 - 43 (32%) had previous training
 - 87% of participants strongly agreed/agreed with the statement that “mouth care is essential for patient care”)
3. Experience
 - 120 (90%) had seen a patient where they had concerns about their oral health
 - 31% never look in a patient’s mouth

Additional barriers included careers not completing oral care properly, lack of updates within the Trust and lack of confidence. 92% felt they would benefit from training in mouth care, assessing the mouth and common oral conditions.

Confidence: Participants confidence with completing oral health tasks for patients

Identifying common oral conditions Knowledge of how to signpost a patient to a dentist Accessing resources to support patients with their oral needs Providing mouth care in a patient Recognizing, removing and cleaning dentures Providing dry mouth care Discussing oral care with a palliative.

Discussion: Limited knowledge and time constraints are shared barriers which have been identified in diabetic nursing settings.

Conclusion:

- Community healthcare staff have a unique opportunity to support oral health needs of vulnerable community patients.
- Specific community interventions are required to overcome the interdisciplinary knowledge barriers that have been identified
- More research needs to be conducted to understand the oral health related quality of life impacts that these training interventions have on patients.