Is There a Population/Dental Public Health Approach to Oral Health for the Elderly? Program and Policy Implications

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2009 Statewide Assessment of Seniors

- 21 long-term nursing facilities (LTC) & 20 meal sites in the same communities

- 834 seniors in LTC & 212 at meal sites screened

- Online survey of nursing directors statewide (n = 443) with almost 50% (220) responding.
Results of Seniors at Meal Sites

- 20% hadn’t had a dental visit in more than 5 years – 50% hadn’t had a dental visit in the last 12 months
- 79% did not have dental insurance and 70% were not eligible for Medicaid
- 19% were edentulous and 50% had no dentures
- 26% had most of their natural teeth
- 35% had untreated decay with 17% have major to urgent dental needs
- 62% with untreated decay also had xerostomia
- 34% had gingivitis
- 19% reported having soft tissue pain
Results of Seniors in LTC

- 35% were edentulous and 50% had no dentures
- 13% had most of their natural teeth
- 59% had untreated decay with 34% have major to urgent dental needs
- 62% with untreated decay also had xerostomia
- 74% had gingivitis
- 3% reported having soft tissue pain, yet 6% needed follow-up care due to soft tissue lesions
Nursing Directors

• Less than 50% knew there was a relationship between oral health and diabetes
• 78% of LTC facilities have registered nurses perform the required oral health screening upon admission
• Shortage of dental professionals, cost of dental care and insurance status are the primary barriers impeding seniors in LTC from accessing routine dental care
Recommendations

• Promote the utilization of the public health dental hygiene workforce in LTC/nursing facilities, senior housing, etc.
• Promote the training of physicians and nurses to perform oral health assessments, oral cancer screenings, and applying fluoride varnish
• Examine and recommend models for coverage of preventive dental care in private and public insurance plans for those 65 years and older
• Expand dental and dental hygiene curriculum and continuing education to include the oral health needs of seniors and the use of portable dental equipment in settings serving seniors
that was then
this is now
Diagnosed with oral cancer in 1991 – 57 years old

Upper denture/lower partial

Seen at a major teaching hospital/dental school where the Tumor Board included dentists – 2 weeks later...

Mandible and a portion of tongue removed

Radiation and hyperbaric therapy before reconstruction

Enrolled in research study to increase salivary production
• Diagnosed with oral cancer in 2011 – 77 years old
• Full compliment of natural teeth
• Not treated at a major teaching hospital/dental school
• Had a dental cleaning prior to treatment
• Received radiation and chemotherapy – no surgery
HPV and Oral Cancer

• Leading cause of all oral/pharyngeal cancers
• 80% of individuals in the US will become infected with HPV in their lifetime
• Individuals with HPV were 32 times more likely to develop oral/pharyngeal cancer
• Been found to have a better outcome – more responsive to radiation and higher survival rates
• 16% of oral cancers (1984-1989), grew to 72% (2000-2004)
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E-Cigarettes

• 48% of current smokers and 55% of recent former smokers have tried e-cigarettes

• 1 in 6 current adult smokers also use e-cigarettes

• 20% of smokers that tried to quit and 22% of recent former smokers use e-cigarettes
• 17% of high schoolers used e-cigarettes in (2014)*
• 9% of 8th graders used e-cigarettes (2014)*

• Hookah use is on the rise - 23% of high school seniors (2014)*

*HHS Office of Adolescent Health
Additional Recommendations

• Raise awareness with the dental consumer on the importance of an annual oral cancer screening/examination
• Create and reimburse for an ADA procedure code for annual oral cancer screenings
• Educate dental professionals on how to have “the talk” with their patients about the risk factors for oral cancer
• Educate all medical specialties (OBGYN, Surgeons, Oncologists, Podiatrists, etc.) on oral health and the benefits of fluoride
• Expand medical/dental benefits to include the application of topical fluoride across the lifespan
• Expand Medicare coverage to include restorative and rehabilitative treatment related to oral cancer
• Lobby for the finalization of e-cigarettes regulations by the Food and Drug Administration
• Actively engage diverse, out-of-the-box coalitions, non-profit organizations and professional associations at the national level to increase awareness about oral diseases
Thank you!