

Research

RECIF-EuroMed CLEN initiates Oral Health Network for Persons with Disabilities (OHNPD)

In the Rhône-Alpes Region in France, around 90,000 individuals with disabilities and more than 140,000 frail and functionally dependent elderly persons (about 5% of overall population) do not have access to dental care and preventive oral health programs. They have a high risk for oral disease that can have a prejudicial effect on their general health, behavior and quality of life. A higher prevalence of dental decay and periodontal disease was found in these groups compared with the general population.

The disabled and the elderly have special oral health needs, such as comprehensive oral examinations and specific treatment recommendations. In addition, these patients require particular techniques of communication. Dental treatment should be adapted to their demands and specific needs. Moreover, providing dental services to this group requires special training among the medical and nursing staff, caregivers and family members. A personalized oral health follow-up should include daily oral hygiene procedures and frequent follow-up examinations. Prophylaxis should be planned in accordance with the patient's needs and abilities.

Amid this growing concern on the oral health for people with special needs, RECIF-EuroMed CLEN teamed up with the Vinatier Hospital in Lyon, France to establish the Oral Health Network for Persons with Disabilities (OHNPD). The aim of the network is to provide within the next ten years approximately 40% of the oral health needs of individuals with disabilities (especially those with mental deficiency) and 30% of the needs of the frail and functionally dependent institutionalized persons. It is estimated that around 41,000 persons in the Rhône-Alpes Region will benefit from this project.

OHNPD has initiated studies to determine oral health status including dental needs of the targeted group. To provide the infrastructure for primary dental care services, Oral Health Centers (OHCs) were established, involving the collaboration of a team of personnel trained in special care in dentistry with local dental private practitioners. Cases that cannot be handled at the OHCs are managed at Oral Health Resources Centers (OHRCs). These OHRCs, located in a hospital or a private clinic, are equipped with facilities for conscious sedation and general anesthesia.

Aside from providing services, the network conducts researches in order to fill the knowledge gaps on prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral health problems that will eventually be translated to policies on oral health care.

RECIF-EuroMed CLEN can provide the expertise needed for these researches. For example, it spearheaded the guideline development on oral health. These guidelines will be disseminated to increase the awareness of the importance of oral health for individuals with disabilities among dental health practitioners. Currently, the network has authorized the following researches related to the elderly and people with disabilities: indices of accessibility of oral health care; barriers to dental treatment; assessment of oral health status; evaluation of oral health needs; prevention, education, and training in oral health; measures of impact of oral health programs; prevention and control of respiratory and intestinal infection of dental origin; and prevention of malnutrition. In addition, feasibility studies on the development of institution-based outreach dental clinics and creation of community clinics will also be conducted. These researches will not only provide answers on the management of oral health but will also strengthen the partnership among RECIF-EuroMed CLEN members and OHNPD.

The co-prime mover in this work, the Vinatier Hospital, has been recognized for its work among persons with special needs. In June 2003, the Department of Oral Health for Persons with Special Needs of the Vinatier Hospital was awarded the First Prize in "Hélioscope 2003", a meeting organized by the foundation, "Hôpitaux de Paris-Hôpitaux de France" (Hospitals of Paris - Hospitals of France), for being a lead institution in recognizing the health needs of disabled and elderly people. Ms. Bernadette Chirac, President of the Foundation, presented the award.

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