

Oral Health Care Service for Elders in a Care and Attention Home

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In Hong Kong, untreated dental diseases and problems are common among the elders who are living in elderly homes. Currently, little dental care service is available to them. There is a definite need for special dental care services targeted at improving the poor oral health condition of the institutionalized elders.

The aim of this community health project was to improve the oral health behaviours and conditions of elders living in an elderly home through the provision of appropriate dental services. It was anticipated that through the implementation of this project, the oral health behaviours and oral health status of the institutionalized elders would be improved.

This project was conducted in a care and attention home for elders with moderate impairment located in Mongkok. The dental service included an oral health education session for all the elders in the home. This was followed by the provision of free clinical examination and treatments in the home using portable dental equipments in four days. The outcome of the dental service was evaluated 4 weeks later through a clinical examination and an interview of a random sample of the elders.

A total of 68 elders participated in this project. It was found that their oral health condition was generally poor and their dental treatment needs substantial. Despite the limitation in time and resources, a large proportion of their treatment needs was fulfilled in this project. The services provided included individualized instructions on oral hygiene (59 persons), topical fluoride applications (23 teeth), scaling (13 persons), 73 ART restorations, 9 extractions, and 10 denture repairs. In the evaluation, it was found that the oral hygiene practices of the study elders had improved, as well as their oral hygiene and periodontal health status.

It is concluded that provision of outreach dental service to institutionalized elders in Hong Kong is feasible and can effectively improve their oral health conditions. It is recommended that the government, charity foundations, non-governmental organizations and the dental profession should work together and support the development of such a meaningful service.