

Advancing Oral Health Care for Patients with Special Needs



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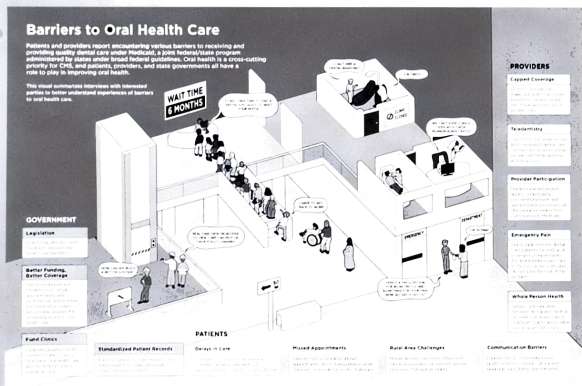
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Background

Individuals with special healthcare needs (ISHCN) includes those with physical disabilities, developmental disorders, cognitive impairments, and/or complex medical conditions. Each of these individuals presents with unique challenges and requirements, demanding a tailored approach to oral health care.

Barriers for care



The barriers to Oral Health Care Illustration: Courtesy Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
www.CMS.gov

Education and Training

This gap can be bridged by the evolution of dental education. Dental schools must incorporate extensive training on treating individuals with special healthcare needs into their curricula. Active transfer of knowledge should also include transferring the right attitude as well as the essential values in patient care.

Supportive Environment

Dental offices can become more accommodating by making physical adjustments, such as installing wheelchair tilts and ramps, providing specialized equipment, and ensuring that examination rooms have sensory adaptations. Scheduling flexibility, friendly staff as well as longer appointment times can also help cater to the unique needs of these patients.



Inclusivity and behavioral shaping

There has been a lot of advocacy for proper use of terminology related to patients with special needs like the usage of Person-first language. Similarly, parking lots as well as toilets have been termed to be accessible.

Policy Change

Advocacy for policy changes is crucial on a broader scale. Stakeholders including the insurance companies must recognize the increased time and resources required to treat patients with special needs. Models must be created that offer adequate reimbursement for both time and effort. Value based care must be advocated actively.

Leveraging Technology and Innovation

Social story is a concept to prepare individuals to dental visits who show reluctance. Additionally, adaptive devices and tools designed to aid in at-home dental care can empower patients and caregivers, making oral hygiene more manageable and effective..



Conclusion

Addressing the oral health concerns of patients with special healthcare needs requires a concerted effort from educators, practitioners, policymakers, stakeholders as well as society in general.

Recommendations

There is a need to champion the cause of oral health care for ISHCN, recognizing their right to a healthy smile and a better quality of life.

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