

Future Vision of Delivery of Oral Health Care in Developing Nations like India

Seema Malhotra¹ and Vinay K Gupta²

ABSTRACT

Oral health is set in early childhood period. With a knowledge base, the pedodontist takes a formidable arsenal of preventive and corrective tools to critically assess and recommend a course for the child. Starting early with oral health counseling increases the chance of good oral health and a positive experience for the child. In developing nations like India awareness of the importance of teeth and especially of deciduous teeth is still miniscule. The programs to spread awareness are still far away. There is a strong case for starting the process of oral health from the school itself, a place through which almost everyone passes through. The school can do wonders for oral health of students.

Keywords: Oral Health, Pedodontist, School

Introduction

Oral health is fundamental to general health and well-being. A healthy mouth enables an individual to speak, eat and socialize without experiencing active disease, discomfort or embarrassment. Oral disease can lead to pain and tooth loss, a condition that affects appearance, quality of life, nutritional intake and, consequently, the growth and development of children. The burden of oral disease is considerable. Good



Dr Seema Malhotra completed her graduation (BDS) from Vinayaka Mission Dental College, Sitapur in year 2003 and postgraduation (MDS) in Pedodontics & Preventive Dentistry from Faculty of Dental Sciences, King George's Medical University, Lucknow (UP), India in 2008.

Currently, she is working as Reader in Saraswati Dental College, Lucknow (UP).

¹Department of Pedodontics & Preventive Dentistry, Sarawati Dental College, ²Public Health Dentistry, Faculty of Dental Sciences, KGMU, Lucknow, India

Corresponding author:

Dr. Vinay Gupta, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Faculty of Dental Sciences, KGMU, Lucknow(UP)-226003, India

Contact: +91-9794153902

E-mail: vinaycommunity@gmail.com

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oral health enables individuals to communicate effectively, to eat and enjoy a variety of foods, and is important in overall quality of life, self-esteem and social confidence. However oral diseases are very common and their impact on both society and the individual are significant. Pain, discomfort, sleepless night, limitation in eating function leading to poor nutrition, and time off school or work due to dental problems are all common impacts of oral diseases.¹

Children who suffer from poor oral health are 12 times more likely to have restricted-activity days than those who do not. More than 50 million school hours are lost annually because of oral health problems which affect children's performance at school and success in later life.¹

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Why there is need for oral health promotion in schools?

Tooth decay and gum disease are among the most widespread conditions in human populations. Many oral health problems are preventable and their early onset reversible. Delay in treatment not only results in aggravation of disease but also cost of care is substantially escalated as a consequence. Adverse dental experience during childhood may lead to dental phobia impacting on attitudes to oral health and self-care as well as dental visiting behaviors of children. Given that many anti-risk behaviors (unfounded fears that visit to a dentist for dental treatment would certainly cause extreme pain) stem during school-age years and schools have powerful influences on children's development and well-being Therefore, there is an urgent need for the promotion of oral health in schools which can be easily integrated with lifestyles developed at a young age due to easy and more frequent access to a dentist in schools. Habit of caring for teeth thus formed is more sustainable.¹

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Why focus efforts through schools?

Schools provide an effective platform for promoting oral health. Oral health messages can be reinforced throughout the school years, which are the most impressionable period of children's lives, and during which lifelong beliefs, attitudes and skills are developed.¹ Children are particularly receptive during this period. Availability of the services of a dentist (Pedodontist) in the school premises itself will help in easy access to dental treatment as well as it will help remove fear psychosis/anxiety of children which they encounter during their first visit to the dentist in an environment i.e other than in a school environment. Further, children being at the highest risk of dental diseases will benefit immensely if they have easy access to a dentist in school itself. This will curtail their school hours lost due to dental disease and also their parents can carry out their daily activities without any hindrance.

A large percentage of people in India residing in semi-urban and urban areas are not fully aware of the importance of oral health. In rural areas the awareness level about oral health is poor. In such an environment the economically disadvantaged sections of society would not seek the services of a dental professional until a serious condition is developed. These people are perhaps not aware that most of the dental problems if not treated in time can become irreversible, will last for a life-time and have impact on quality of life and general health.

Why a need of pedodontist in school settings?

A dentist appointed in District Hospital or Community Health Centre and private practitioners are not well trained nor very keen to manage children and not much emphasis is given by them to motivate or educate the child and their parents. In order to improve the oral health of child execution of school health program by the Government and by dental college is very difficult as to reach nearly every child and repeatedly giving education is nearly impossible. Dental colleges which can impart programs for oral health awareness and also do quality treatment are not in every city/towns but schools are. Many NGO's have taken initiative to assemble children of a particular area to impart basic education. Hence the density of schools in an area with children of different socioeconomic status is increased tremendously. Hence employing a Pedodontist at a particular school is the more feasible approach in improving the oral health and increasing the awareness of the importance of primary teeth. The schools which have students more than thousand and half can permanently employ a pedodontist. Smaller size schools in that particular area can be grouped into the one large school to maintain a ratio at par with the ratio of dentist to population in India 1: 10,000. The schools clubbed together in one group at a particular locality may

be according to their financial state and be able to give their contribution for the salary of pedodontist in their particular group. Government should formulate a policy that elite schools should spend a particular percentage of their profit on the upliftment of oral health of a child hence they would relent eventually for permanently employing a pedodontist.

A lot of time and money is spent to invent and discover new things in dentistry that will enhance the efficiency of doctor and the quality of treatment of patient. The treatment is getting costlier which is increasingly becoming inaccessible for the poor because of its unaffordability. To bridge the gap of good treatment and its accessibility, there is a need for employing a pedodontist in schools. The cost of treatment will be marginal and the quality of treatment would be of high standard. In dental trauma – loosening/fracture of tooth – immediate access to the dentist may save the natural tooth.

As today is the age of specialization, therefore, instead of dental nurse or dental hygienist, who are only equipped with the basic knowledge of dentistry, the pedodontist can not only perform their role but can also widen the horizon of awareness and treatment that can be delivered to school children as if at their doorstep Also by keeping record book of a child a longitudinal assessment of the oral health status and their improvement in their hygiene practice habit can be easily evaluated and then according to that if the desired outcome is not achieved then change in the way of education or addition of some other topics can be done.

How schools will benefit from hiring a pedodontist?

There is a stiff competition amongst schools for creation of additional infrastructure/facilities so as to be rated as one of the best schools in the locality/city. This is done to attract the attention of parents so that larger numbers of parents bring their children to such a school for admission. This also enables schools to justify hikes in tuition fees, which quite often are disproportionate to the new facilities being created. Clamor for admission to a good/reputed school (school which markets/hypes its facilities well) goes up because now-a-days social status of parents is linked to the reputation of school in which their child studies. In the race for one- upmanship, schools try to outdo each other. In the process, some schools provide ACs in class rooms, AC buses for transportation of children and so on just to lure parents.

Instead of expending their resources on creation of extravagant facilities, school managements should invest in such facilities which look after children's long term interests like employing pedodontist which will help in enhancing oral health of children. The managements will thus also be contributing towards discharging their social responsibility. Oral health being fundamental to general health and well being, the facility will ultimately lead to better quality of

life of students. Hiring of pedodontist by the school might necessitate a slight increase in the tuition fee which most of the parents would support whole-heartedly keeping in view the immense health benefits. Schools which employ a pedodontist will indirectly benefit as their reputation in the local area will go up and it will have positive effect even on school admissions.

Voluminous literature exists on the status of the oral health status in the children of Indian population.²⁻¹⁰ The result of these studies sheds light on the need of oral health promotion and understanding the importance of oral health care to be imparted at very early years of life.

Let us come together and pledge ourselves and strive for a better tomorrow by giving a pearly smile to every child!

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