Encouraging Better Practice in Aged Care

Round 1 project overview

Oral health

Central Northern Adelaide Health Service, South Australian (SA) Dental Service

Better oral health in residential care

Project overview

The project aimed to develop an evidence-based, oral health practice model that utilised a portfolio of resources, including new educational resources and the existing Oral Health Assessment Toolkit for GPs, for residents in six residential aged care facilities located in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

This project was led by the Central Northern Adelaide Health Service, South Australian (SA) Dental Service and supported by the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health (ARCPOH) at the University of Adelaide, the Department of Human Services Victoria and the Centre for Oral Health Strategy NSW Health.

What was done?

- An Oral Health Assessment Tool, developed in 2005, was modified during the project to become a one-page document for use by GPs and RNs. It recommends that a resident have an oral health assessment performed by a GP or RN on admission to the aged care facility and subsequently on a regular basis and as the need arises.
- Three educational resource portfolios, accompanied by a series of posters, resident information and an oral health resource kit, were developed to support the key processes of the Better Oral Health in Residential Care Model.
- GPs and RNs were provided with a Professional Portfolio which consisted of self-directed learning resources to help them develop their knowledge and skills in relation to oral health assessment, oral health care planning and dental referral protocols.
- An education and training program was developed to support the key process of daily oral hygiene. Selected RNs took part in a ‘train the trainer’ program to prepare them to train aged care staff at their facility. A Facilitator Portfolio and resource kit was developed and provided to assist RNs in this role.
- A Staff Portfolio for direct care nurses and care workers was developed and implemented to support the oral health education and training program.
- Simple key messages were formulated to reinforce the change processes.

What was achieved?

What was the impact for residents?

- Oral health assessments undertaken by GPs and RNs before and after the implementation of the Better Oral Health in Residential Care Model showed significant improvement in oral health status of residents over the life of the project.
- The quality of life measures for residents who suffered impacts from poor oral health improved significantly. Residents’ improvement in oral health had a significant contribution to their wellbeing and general health. It was reported that residents:
  - had more positive social experiences;
  - showed higher levels of interpersonal confidence and self-esteem;
  - realised they did not have to live with discomfort or pain;
  - smiled more often;
  - enjoyed eating; and
  - had a better appearance.

What was the impact for staff?

- Staff better understood the impact of oral health on general health, which motivated them to deliver better oral health care for residents.
- RNs did 60 per cent of oral health assessments and were very positive about the Oral Health Assessment Toolkit and other resources.
- Care workers were very positive about the training program and increased their effectiveness and competency in oral health care.
- Staff became more confident and able to perform the activities of daily oral hygiene, and more confident in identifying problems and referring residents for dental care.
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What could be adopted in other services?
Examples of small changes that facilities could make to have a positive impact on resident’s oral and dental health include:

- Adopt the following practices to maintain a healthy mouth and protect residents’ oral health:
  - Brush morning and night
  - Use high fluoride toothpaste on teeth
  - Use a soft toothbrush on gums, tongue and teeth
  - Use an antibacterial product after lunch
  - Keep the mouth moist
  - Cut down on sugar
- Employ a team approach to maintain a healthy mouth – Work together to protect your residents’ oral health.
- Use GPs and RNs to identify residents requiring a dental referral.
- Utilise RNs to champion oral health. They can also use the oral health assessment tool to inform oral care planning, monitor residents’ oral health and evaluate oral hygiene interventions.
- Consider participating in the Better Oral Health in Residential Care education and training program. Consider using RNs to deliver the training to other staff, following a ‘train the trainer’ model.
- Consider how dentists and other dental professionals might be encouraged to visit residential aged care facilities through appropriate supports, such as access to portable equipment.
- Use simple toothbrushes that can be bent easily. They are the most economic and effective tool for improving oral health.

What resources are available?
The project produced a comprehensive suite of resources, including three educational resource portfolios, accompanied by a series of posters, resident information and an oral health resource kit:

- The Professional Portfolio was developed for GPs and RNs as a self-directed learning resource supporting the key processes of oral health assessment, oral health care planning and dental treatment. It includes the modified Oral Health Assessment Tool.
- The Facilitator’s Portfolio and an oral health resource kit were developed to support the RN trainer.
- The Staff Portfolio was compiled as a take-home resource for direct care nurses and care workers attending the education and training program. It is highly visual and easy to read.

These resources are available at:

Better Oral Health in Residential Care training
Building on the EBPAC project, the Better Oral Health in Residential Care training project was rolled out nationally to all residential aged care facilities in 2010. A number of registered training organisations were selected to deliver the training. Using a train-the-trainer approach, the intention is to train up to two registered nurses or dedicated trainers in each Australian Government funded residential aged care facility, multi-purpose service and Indigenous flexible residential aged care service as trainers, so that they in turn, can train and support aged care workers in ensuring residents’ daily oral hygiene is maintained.

For more information see http://www.health.gov.au/betteroralhealthtraining

Where can I get more information?
For further information regarding this and other Round 1 EBPAC projects see the Department of Health and Ageing website at http://www.health.gov.au/ebpac