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**Term Project**

Dental health care is a problem for majority of the people within United States. There are many factors that contribute to today's poor dental care system. This includes the limited access to dental care, lack of education, and insufficient funds for dental treatment. We can see this featured in the PBS documentary titled “Dollars and Dentists”. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many negative impacts involving oral hygiene. This was highlighted and introduced by the article written by the New York Times. Furthermore, the Journal of Dental Hygiene points out the importance of dental care and the effects it has on children.

Throughout the documentary presented by frontline PBS called “Dollars and Dentists”, there was a clear problem against the dental healthcare system and the United States. It has shown that there were too many people throughout the United States without access to dental care or the funds for dental treatment. The documentary revealed that there were many patients unable to afford their dental bill and not able to get the treatment they needed due to insufficient funds. Since working at a dental office, there were many instances where a patient was unable to afford their needed dental treatment due to expensive prices. Instead of turning them away, we proposed a payment plan that allowed the patients to gradually pay us back overtime. This grants patients to get the treatment they need regardless of their financial situation. To move on , not only is there a problem with the treatment and cost of dentistry, but there is also a lack of education on oral hygiene in the United States. When speaking with fellow classmates, we all agreed that the lack of education may lead to more dental risk for patients' long term. It is crucial for patients to know the importance of oral hygiene and how their diet and nutrition plays a big role in their overall oral health. In addition, the treatment the patients were receiving throughout the documentary was alarming and shocking. It was hard to watch doctors working more for money than the actual well-being of their patients. From this documentary it could be said that dentistry in America seems more like a business than a health care provider. Throughout the documentary it showed lack of empathy and genuine care for these patients and instead treated them without any education or conversation about their current and previous dental histories and work. Instead of taking their time to teach their patients, they are only thinking about themselves and how it may benefit the office financially. As a dental hygienist, some ways we can improve for the dental care system in the United States is to actively advocate and teach patients the importance of oral health and hygiene. Many people may be unaware of what may cause cavities and how they may prevent it. As a clinician it is our job to educate patients on the risks of tobacco, soda, candy, and the importance of annual dental checkups.

The Journal of Dental Hygiene described the different access to oral healthcare and the effects it may have on the vulnerable population present in the United States. This hardship for oral health care is directly affecting the children of the United States both short and long term due to improper access to dental care for children. Some of the external barriers that may contribute to the problem are “the prohibitive costs associated with dental care; inability to obtain dental insurance; shortage and maldistribution of dentists; low rate of Medicaid provider participation” *(Bersell,2017).* Due to all these factors, it is increasingly difficult for some children to receive the necessary care they need for dental treatment. Not only are they at risk because of these barriers, but kids are also codependent on a parent or guardian for dental care appointments, as well as their daily oral hygiene, and nutritional health. Some of the “short-term effects may include pain, tooth loss, chewing difficulty, speech impediment, sleep disruption, inability to concentrate, school absence, behavioral problems, compromised self-esteem and social development, emergency visits, and extensive treatment requiring general anesthesia. Long-term effects may include a higher risk of new carious lesions, malocclusion due to premature tooth loss, nutritional problems, diminished physical growth, dental anxiety or fear, and poor oral health” *(Bersell,2017)*. Since children are still young, it is important to receive dental care treatment to avoid negative effects that may follow them into adulthood.

The world of dentistry and many other health care professions have been adjusted and changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that stirred early March 2020. Due to the global pandemic many patients developed an enduring toll on their oral health. One of the negative impacts the pandemic had was when “more than a quarter of the dentists reported an increase in cavities and gum disease — quite likely a result of changes in people’s diets and hygiene” *(Tingley,2021).* The pandemic altered many people's diets, as they were stuck at home, and bored leading to more snacking and drinking. Not only was there an increase in caries risk, but there were also many patients that lost dental insurance due to not being able to work anymore. It was “found that six million adults had lost their dental insurance because of the pandemic, and more than one in 10 had delayed getting care because of cost, lack of insurance, fear of exposure to the virus or a combination of those factors” *(Tingley,2021).* As a fellow dental consumer, as well as an employee, there were many instances where a patient lost their health insurance or was just fearful of catching the COVID-19 disease. As a consumer, it was definitely very difficult for me to go back into the office and feel safe about not getting sick. This pandemic gave doctors a way to communicate with their patients without the risk of spreading the virus. Through telecommunication, “Capurro and colleagues came up with a program to mail fluoride varnish to patients’ homes and supervise virtually as parents applied it to their children” *(*Tingley*,2021).* This was a smart and effective way to help parents reduce the risk for caries for their children and another beneficial way to take care of oral hygiene even without being physically at the office.

In conclusion, the problems of the dental care system remain an issue in the United States. From the documentary and articles mentioned above we can see the effects of the dental care system and the way it is affecting the oral health of Americans. As dental hygienists it is our job to educate and inform patients about the importance of oral hygiene and its positive effect in the long term. Patients’ education on the risks and prevention of oral hygiene and disease is just as important as dental treatment and should be practiced more often in dental offices.

**Citations**

Tingley, Kim. “The Pandemic Was Bad for Our Teeth. Will It Change Oral Health Forever?” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 19 May 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/19/magazine/the-pandemic-was-bad-for-our-teeth-will-it-change-oral-health-forever.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap>.

Bersell, Catherine H. “Access to Oral Health Care: A National Crisis and Call for Reform.” *Journal of Dental Hygiene*, American Dental Hygienists' Association, 1 Feb. 2017, <https://jdh.adha.org/content/91/1/6>.

*PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 11 Jan. 2018, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/dollars-and-dentists/>. Accessed 24 Nov. 2022.