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Term Project

The traditional list of immediate basic needs, necessities of life, is food, shelter, and clothing. If we lack in one of three, we will not be able to live for long. Unfortunately, there are more numbers of people than what people usually think regarding how many people are suffering with food. There are many disturbances, but one of the critical disturbances is lack in maintaining good oral health. The Frontline PBS documentary “Dollars and Dentists”, an article “Access to Oral Health Care: A National Crisis and Call for Reform”, and a case report regarding odontogenic sepsis provide statistic information about our country’s oral health, and problem that made people to have bad oral health.

In the Frontline PBS documentary “Dollars and Dentists”, it showed how rural people were not able to get any dental treatment because they were not able to afford it. For example, Vanessa Nation, who traveled eight hours to Washington DC to get the free examination, ended up taking all her teeth out, due to her neglecting of her teeth. However, it is more likely the cost after examination that made her to leave her teeth decay. She said that when she had the first dental pain, it was when she lost her job and have finance issues. So, she had to go to emergency room to get a prescription for antibiotic, to prevent to get any complication through infections. As ER provided the prescription to her, they told her to go to her dentist for treatment because Emergency Room does not have equipment for the dental infections. However, she could not visit her dentist because she knows that it will cost her a lot, and she cannot afford it. I knew that people in rural area would not be able to visit dentist as often as urban area, but I was not aware about the numbers of people who could not visit the dentist for a treatment. Also, the narrator stated that only 10% of dentists over nation participate in Medicaid program, resulting only 25% of Medicaid-eligible children gets the treatment. This statistic shows how low-income families are not getting proper treatment, and how the dentists are not concerning about people who have Medicaid Program. Even though ones are in Medicaid Program, not all of them were with warm heart. Some dental providers take advantage to make profit as rural areas do not have much of dental office. As an example, in the documentary, Connecticut’s Medicaid rate increased dramatically in 2008 because of the increase in dental providers like Kool Smiles. After few months, Connecticut Medicaid department received volumes of requests from Kool Smiles for stainless-steel crowns and pulpotomies. After investigation, the X-Rays of patients after being treated with pulpotomy and stainless-steel crown showed that the examination was done very poorly. The crowns were not properly fit into the teeth, and the pulpotomy was not fill properly. What the documentary found was, the Kool Smiles tends to make children to get crowns instead of fillings, which cost 50% more. Statistically, the percentage that Kool Smile made children under age eight to get stainless-steel crown came out as 50% more than any other state Medicaid providers.

The article “Access to Oral Health Care: A National Crisis and Call for Reform” also supports the ideas from “Dollars and Dentists” Documentary. The article stated regarding vulnerable population that “Dental caries is almost completely preventable, but access to preventive care is out of reach for many families.” Then it continued by stating “The national average of practicing dentists who accept Medicaid is 20%.” The article also gave the reasons why the percentage is low, “Reasons cited for the limited involvement with Medicaid include low reimbursement rates, cumbersome administrative processes, high rates of appointment no-shows, and low compliance with recommended treatment.” Because children are dependent, they consider as vulnerable population, and as the result of only few dental offices exist in rural areas, it became more difficult for children to visit dentist with the high cost of examination. Like the article says, dental caries is the most common chronic disease of childhood. However, untreated dental caries can impact the health of children, and even during their adulthood in the future. As an evidence, the case report regarding the 67-year-old man’s death from overwhelming odontogenic sepsis explained the importance of maintaining good oral health. This patient went to hospital after three days of his increasing neck swelling and difficulty in breathing. Throughout the intraoral examination, he had Ludwig’s Angina caused by his multiple carious and periodontally involved teeth. Today, Ludwig’s Angina has less than 10% of mortality rate with the surgical incision and drainage technology. However, because the patient had isolated dental infection due to his bad oral health, it led him to have multi-system organ failure, and died in result. This case of 67-year-old patient evidences the reason why we must maintain good oral health.

The best part of Korea is, they have well covering health insurances including dental. Well covering meaning that the insurance covers well enough, the patients do not usually pay huge amount of money on many examinations. For example, the endodontic treatment in Korea costs about $15 with the insurance. However, because many people do not take periodical examination, they end up extract the tooth and receive implant. Implant in Korea cost nearly the same as United States. I used to feel scared and anxious about going to dental office because I was worried if I have any caries or infections that will make me suffer throughout the treatment. Usually by this thought, I was very hesitated in vising dental office. But after I learned how the periodical examination prevents from lots of infections, and saves my money, I overcame the fear towards the dental office. Learning about infections and diseases caused by poor oral health can be one solution to improve the dental care in our country. Many people do not take oral infections seriously as much as our body diseases like cancer. I was one of the people, but after I educated myself, it changed my thought. Dental hygienists, they should put more effort in educating patients in more serious manner, and personally I can also inform my surroundings with the information that I have learned throughout this semester regardless if they are suffering with oral health or not, since no one knows when they will have infections.

In conclusion, The Frontline PBS documentary “Dollars and Dentists”, an article “Access to Oral Health Care: A National Crisis and Call for Reform”, and a case report regarding odontogenic sepsis demonstrated how containing good oral health is very important, yet not many people are still getting right treatment. As the way how Dentist Tara Wheeler from Sarrell Dental Center from the Frontline PBS documentary “Dollars and Dentists” provides her patients, we should treat everybody the same, with same respect, and with same love. Money is not all, I believe if we work for the people, it will follow.