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ORAL HEALTH: GATEWAY TO OVERALL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Bianca Ruiz-Negrón (Man Hung, PhD; Ryan Moffat, DDS; Gagandeep Gill, MS; Evelyn Lauren; Megan Rosales, MS; James Richey; Frank W. Licari, DDS)

Department of Orthopaedic Surgery Operations

Introduction

Oral health is an important part of an individual's well-being, but there is limited evidence that supports the concept that better oral health is associated with better overall health and well-being. Our study aimed to examine the impact of oral health on overall health of the United States' aging population.

Methods

For our study, data from the 2015-2016 cycle of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey including individuals older than 65 years were used. Variables, such as demographics, perceptions of oral health and perceptions of overall health and well-being were included. Mean, standard deviation and percentage as appropriate were used to calculate weighted prevalence estimates, and chi-square tests logistic regressions were performed to examine the association of oral health with physical, mental health, general health condition and systemic disease conditions.

Results

Approximately 47.5 million people who were 65 years or older representative of the United States' population were reported in this study. Statistically significant relationships were found between oral health and general health, energy levels, work limitation, depression and appetite. Analysis also showed that positive oral health was associated with better general health, better mental health, higher energy levels, and better appetite. Out of the ten systemic diseases being investigated, six of them were significantly associated with oral health outcome.

Conclusion

This large national study provided strong empirical evidence that oral health contributes largely to an individual's general health and several aspects of a positive quality of life, particularly in the elderly. These findings highlight the need to provide necessary oral health care services for elderly. Moving forward, it is important that health care systems prioritize the oral health needs of the elderly, who generally find themselves with limited access to care.