Oral Health and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

Dr. Yawen Peng, Assistant Professor at the College of Dental Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences

Course Details:

This seminar will offer healthcare providers the knowledge and tools for individuals with ASD in oral health care at home and in a dentist office.

One in 68 children have Autism Spectrum Disorders (CDC March 2014). Their characteristics of difficulties with communication, social interaction and sensory processing possess potential challenges in oral health maintenance.

Course Objectives:

Participants will learn:

1. Describe barriers for ASD individuals to achieve a oral health
2. Recognize common oral conditions associated with ASD individuals
3. Recommend various tools such as a visual schedule to improve oral hygiene experiences at home
4. Utilize behavior modification methods to improve visiting experiences in a dental office

CODA Standards met:

2-12 Graduates must be competent in providing dental hygiene care for the child, adolescent, adult and geriatric patient. Graduates must be competent in assessing the treatment needs of patients with special needs.
2-15 Graduates must be competent in communicating and collaborating with other members of the health care team to support comprehensive patient care.

Canadian Competencies met:

B. The dental hygienist as a communicator and collaborator ...
“Communication involves an interchange of ideas, opinions and information. This category addresses numerous dimensions of communication including: internal and external exchanges, written, verbal, non-verbal and listening skills, computer literacy, providing appropriate information to different audiences, working with the media and social marketing techniques. Collaboration captures the abilities required to influence and work with others to improve the health and well-being of the public through the pursuit of a common goal. Partnership and collaboration optimizes performance through shared resources and responsibilities.

E. The dental hygienist as a coordinator...
To organize complex undertakings which involve numerous individuals, to bring their contributions together to support client needs and outcomes. This involves the ability to harmonize contributions towards unified action or effort.

H. The dental hygienist as a health promoter ...
Health promotion: The process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health. It not only embraces actions directed at strengthening the skills and capabilities of individuals, but also action directed towards changing social, environmental and economic conditions so as to alleviate their impact on public and individual health. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) describes five key strategies for health promotion: build healthy public policy; create supportive environments for health; strengthen community action for health; develop personal skills; and re-orient health services.

Classroom Discussion Questions:

1. Please describe 3 barriers for Individuals with ASD to achieve their oral health. How might you address these barriers to provide dental services?
2. Please name 3 oral conditions commonly seen in individuals with ASD. How do these relate to their oral health?
3. Please recommend 3 tools to improve oral hygiene experiences at home and discuss how you could address this with patient and caregiver.
4. Please identify 3 behavior modification methods for individuals with ASD to improve the patient’s experience in a dental office.

Classroom Activities for Additional Learning:

1. Individuals with ASD experience difficulties in sensory processing. Work within groups and discuss how this condition impacts different senses such as olfactory, auditory, taste, etc., as well as how these impacts relate to your clinical care.
2. There are many oral issues associated with ASD individuals. Work within groups and discuss recommendations to prevent further development of these oral conditions.
3. Download the "Magnuscard" app on your phone or tablet. Browse this app and discuss ways it would be helpful for a patient with ASD.

Exam Questions:

1. Only 5% of individuals with ASD exhibit sensory difficulty.
   A) True
   B) False
   
   Answer: B False (False- 95% of individuals with ASD exhibits sensory difficulties)

2. More than half of the individuals with ASD exhibit difficulty waiting in the waiting room
   A) True
   B) False
   
   Answer: A True (True- 64% report difficulty waiting in the waiting room, compared to only 3.6% of typical developing individuals.

3. Which one of the following conditions is NOT commonly associated with ASD individuals?
   A. Hypersensitive teeth (due to heavy grinding and erosion)
   B. Drooling (Due to swallowing disorder)
   C. Asthma (Answer)
   D. Tongue thrusting (Due to low muscle tone)"
   
   Answer: C Asthma (Hypersensitivy due to grinding and erosion, drooling due to swallowing disorders, tongue thrusting due to low muscle tone)

4. "Power suit" is used for deep pressure stimulation in individuals with ASD.
   A) True
   B) False
   
   Answer: A True