Department of Community Dentistry and Behavioral Science, College of Dentistry

Development of an Oral Health Screening Tool for Behavioral Health Clinicians Serving Clients with Special Health Care Needs

Brittany L. Desyr, Olga S. Ensz, Reeva C. Morton, & Daniel W. McNeil

BACKGROUND

- Perceptions of oral health and conditions of the oral cavity affect different areas of life, including physical, mental, social and emotional health aspects.[1]
- Individuals with special health care needs face extenuating barriers to oral health care access, increasing their risk for dental problems which negatively impacts their overall quality of life.[2]
- The AAPHD defines special health care needs as those with any physical, developmental, mental, sensory, behavioral, cognitive, or emotional impairment that require medical management, health care intervention, or use of specialized services, and may impose limitations in performing daily activities or substantial limitations in a major life activity.[3]
- Integrating oral health screenings in behavioral or mental health settings can aid in the early identification of oral health issues and promote dental care utilization that enhances overall health outcomes.[3]
- Currently, there is a lack of evidenced-based screening tools for behavioral or mental healthcare providers to assess various dimensions of oral health access barriers or oral health-related quality of life (OHRQoL) for patients with special health care needs.

METHODS

Instrument Development

- A piloted screening tool was created for behavioral or mental healthcare providers to assess the current level of dental care utilization, perceived OHRQoL, and dimensions of oral health access barriers for their clients with special health care needs.
- The tool was developed after a comprehensive literature review on existing screening tools that evaluated structural, financial, personal, or cultural barriers to oral health access and OHRQoL.
- PubMed search included phrasing including “special needs populations AND oral health related questions”, “special needs population OR sensory deficit AND oral health”, and “oral health survey for clinical psychologist”.
- An interprofessional team consisting of a dentist and a board-certified behavior analyst developed items followed by a consensus being reached.
- An instrument containing 8 multiple-choice items was constructed, focusing on various social determinant and OHR-QoL components.
- The instrument was translated to the online platform Qualtrics Survey for easy distribution and access to results for administrators.

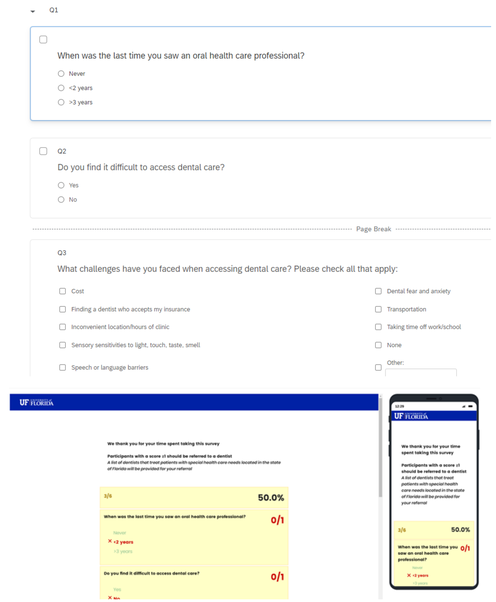
Test Administration

- Behavioral health providers are currently being recruited from the University of Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UF CARD).
- Question items were scored using a 2-point Likert scale, with an overall score of ≥ 1 signaling a recommended referral to a dentist.

RESULTS

- Study personnel are currently collecting feedback from UF CARD behavioral health providers from their experiences utilizing the pilot dental screening tool.
- Recommendations will be integrated into a final instrument following preliminary qualitative evaluations for dissemination to a wider target audience.

SAMPLE TEST ITEM



CONCLUSIONS

- The incorporation of a dental screening tool in non-dental settings allows for early identification and referral of dental problems in special health care needs clients by behavioral and mental health care providers.
- This study highlights opportunities for interprofessional collaboration and health care promotion for vulnerable populations.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Brittany L. Desyr, bdesyr@dental.ufl.edu
Olga S. Ensz, oensz@dental.ufl.edu

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Poster presented at the National Oral Health Conference, April 2025 Orlando, FL