

Special Needs Patients and Perceived Barriers to Care



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Purpose

The goal of this research is to examine and analyze the perceived barriers to care for special needs patients as reported by current board certified and board eligible pediatric dentists in the United States.

Introduction

- The definition of special health care needs, as defined by the AAPD, is "...any physical, developmental, mental, sensory, behavioral, cognitive, or emotional impairment or limiting condition that requires medical management, health care intervention, and/or use of specialized services or programs. The condition may be congenital, developmental, or acquired through disease, trauma, or environmental cause and may impose limitations in performing daily self-maintenance activities or substantial limitations in a major life activity" (1).
- Special needs patients often face barriers to receiving oral health care, including limited access to these specialized providers and a lack of facilities equipped to accommodate their unique healthcare needs.
- Understanding these barriers from the perspective of practicing pediatric dentists is critical to improving access to dental services for this vulnerable population

Methods

Study Design and Target Population: The research was a cross-sectional study design. In this study we anonymously surveyed board certified and board eligible AAPD members.

Survey Instrument: The 11-item questionnaire was developed and distributed to board certified and board eligible AAPD members via email. The 11-item questionnaire consisted of mostly checkbox and multiple-choice type questions. Questions 1-3 were predominantly related to participant demographics. The remainder of the questionnaire assessed what current board certified and board eligible AAPD members perceive as the greatest barrier to care for special need patients.

Data Collection: Data was collected via email, through electronic copies of the questionnaire, distributed to board certified and board eligible pediatric dentists with active AAPD membership from April 2024-December 2024. No identifying information was collected to ensure anonymity.

Results

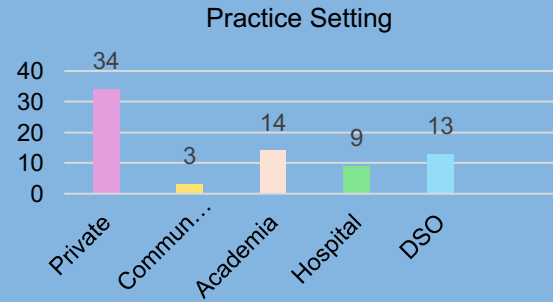


Figure 1. Distribution of practice setting among participants

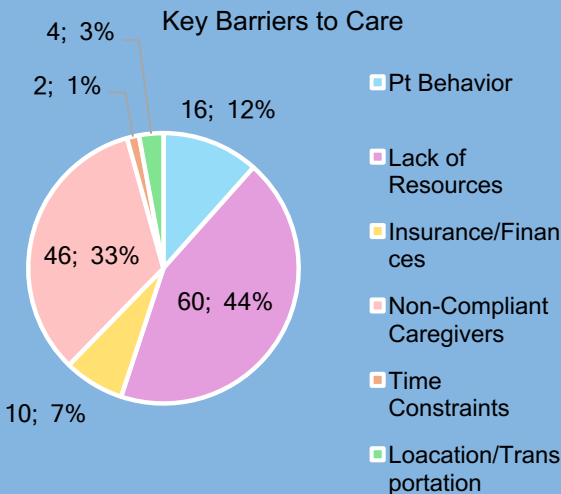


Figure 2. Greatest barriers to providing SHCN care as perceived by participants

Results

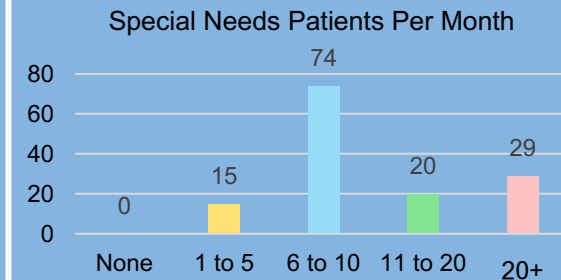


Figure 3. Average of special needs patient's seen per month by participants

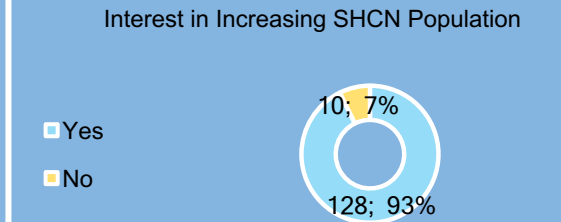


Figure 4. Participant interest in increasing their SHCN population

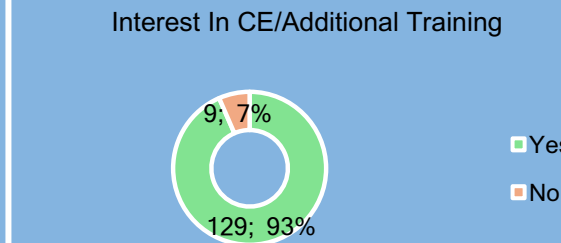


Figure 5. Participant interest in additional CE / training courses

Discussion/Conclusion

- A limited number of survey responses were collected (138). Therefore, a true correlation could not be observed.
- Survey data indicates that most respondents currently work in a private practice setting and treat approximately six to ten special needs patients monthly.
- Key barriers identified include limited resources and difficulties associated with non-compliant parents and caregivers, both of which impede optimal care delivery.
- Despite these challenges, a substantial number of participants expressed a strong interest in expanding their special needs patient base, provided that these barriers could be addressed effectively.
- These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions and resource allocation to enhance the accessibility and quality of dental care for this underserved population

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