

Oral Health Care among Elderly Patients Attending a Nigerian Teaching Hospital

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Abstract

Background: Ageing is a natural process and should be regarded as a normal or inevitable biological phenomenon. The dental needs of the elderly are changing and growing. The management of elderly patients requires an understanding of the medical and dental aspects of ageing. **Objective:** To determine the pattern of oral treatments among elderly patients attending a teaching hospital in South-east Nigeria. **Methodology:** A retrospective review of the hospital records of elderly patients who attended and received various forms of oral treatment in Dental clinic, University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu State, Nigeria from January 2016 to December 2016 was done. **Results:** A total of 82 elderly patients were clinically evaluated and had oral treatments, 39 (47.6%) were males, 43 (52.4%) were females giving a male to female ratio of 1:1.1. The age range of the patients was 61 to 105 years with a mean age of 70.2 ± 8.6 years. Extraction of teeth (51.2%) was the most common treatment received followed by periodontal treatment. $P=0.44$. **Conclusion:** There is a need for elderly people to visit dentists regularly even in absence of dental problems so that disease initiation can be recognized and prompt dental treatment can be rendered.

Keywords: *Elderly, Oral Care, Oral Health*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a natural process and should be regarded as a normal or inevitable biological phenomenon¹. Oral health is now considered an important and integral part of general health because poor oral health causes pain, discomfort, affects speech, ability to eat, sleep, self-esteem and confidence². The purpose of using oral hygiene aids like chewing stick, and toothbrush with toothpaste is to attain good oral hygiene compatible with good oral health³. Poor oral health among geriatric patients is common, and poor oral conditions will have a negative impact^{4,5} on the general health of elderly patients. Oral conditions that are commonly seen among the aged population are dental caries, chronic periodontitis, and oral cancer. These conditions are common among geriatric individuals globally⁴. In elderly patients, trauma to teeth is often neglected when not associated with pain, shocking sensation and abscess⁶. The dental needs of the elderly are changing and growing. The management of elderly patients requires an understanding of the medical and dental aspects

of ageing⁷. Oral diseases such as dental caries, periodontitis, halitosis, orofacial tumours and oral cancers are serious public health problems in both developed and developing countries.

Early diagnosis, early intervention and preventive treatments can prevent or decrease the progress of most oral diseases, that when left untreated, can cause pain, negative health consequences⁸ and affect quality of life. Healthy teeth and oral tissues are important for good quality of life. One of the essential roles of oral health care is to provide adequate treatment to those with oral lesions or conditions so that the disease is arrested at an early stage and complications are prevented⁹. Oral health is often neglected in the elderly and oral diseases associated with aging are complex, adversely affecting the quality of life¹⁰. There is a need for elderly people to visit dentists regularly even in absence of dental problems so that disease initiation can be recognized and prompt dental treatment can be rendered. Tooth preservation is the ultimate goal of modern dental care¹¹. Barriers to oral health

care among the elderly are considerable. Impaired mobility, disabilities, poverty, inadequate financing for oral health care, and lack of oral health facilities limits access to care particularly for those who reside in rural areas. Previous study reported that oral diseases and the provision of dental treatment is strongly influenced by patient's belief, attitudes and values¹². Planning for health services accessibility and specialized prevention should be seriously considered, especially in developing countries. There should be more awareness that the dental needs of the elderly people have been generally neglected and that the problem requires attention.

The Nigerian National Population Commission define the elderly in Nigeria as person's age 60 years and above¹³. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), people with 60 years of age and older are considered as elderly¹⁴. There are various studies on elderly individuals in Nigeria. The aim of this study is to determine the pattern of oral treatments among elderly patients attending a teaching hospital in South-east Nigeria. It would also contribute to the existing data on elderly patients in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A retrospective review of the hospital records of elderly patients who attended and received various forms of oral treatment in Dental clinic, University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu State, Nigeria from January 2016 to December 2016 was done. University of Nigeria teaching hospital is a tertiary health facility serving many local government areas of Enugu State and neighbouring States.

The demographic and clinical data, such as age, sex, diagnosis, treatment plan and treatment received (after verbal informed consent) were retrieved from the patients' records and analyzed using SPSS version 20. Medical records with incomplete data, patients less than 61 years and elderly patients who had only incisional biopsy (for histology) done for benign and malignant tumours were excluded. Ethical clearance for this study was sought from Ethical Committee of University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, (HREC, UNTH) Enugu, and obtained before

commencement. Data were analysed using a computer software programme, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. P values < 0.05 were accepted as being statistically significant.

3. RESULTS

A total of 82 elderly patients were clinically evaluated and had oral treatments, 39(47.6%) were males, 43(52.4%) were females giving a male to female ratio of 1:1.1 The age range of the patients was 61 to 105 years with a mean age of 70.2 ± 8.6 years as shown in Table 1. The highest demand for oral treatment (57.3 %) was found in the 60-69 years age group, this was followed by the 70-79 years age group as shown in Table 1. Extraction of teeth (51.2%) was the most common treatment received followed by periodontal treatment as shown in table 2. P=0.44

Table1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Patients

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	39	47.6
Female	43	52.4
Age group(yrs)		
60-69	47	57.3
70-79	24	29.3
80-89	9	11.0
90-99	0	0
100-109	2	2.4
	82	100

Table 2. Treatments received by elderly patients

Variable	Number	Percent
Extraction	42	51.2
Periodontal treatment	20	24.4
Incision and drainage	5	6.1
Endodontic treatment	2	2.4
Fillings(restorations)	4	4.9
Others	9	11
	82	100
P-value = 0.44		

3. DISCUSSION

Early diagnosis, early intervention and preventive treatments can prevent or decrease the progress of most oral diseases, that when left untreated, can cause pain, negative health consequences and affect quality of life. Periodontal diseases are seen more in the elderly population due to the cumulative progression of disease over time¹⁵. Dental caries and its sequelae affects both sexes, all races, all socioeconomic status and all age groups¹⁶. In this study, extraction of teeth was the most common treatment received and it was mostly for sequelae of dental caries. Previous study reported that 65.7% of elderly people have not visited a dental clinic, 39.1% of elderly individuals expect extraction as solution to their dental problem and 35.5 % believe they don't need dental care¹². The assessment of the general health of elderly patient should be part of the dental treatment protocol, and should be completed well before beginning any procedure¹⁷. How treatment will affect the daily life of the elderly patient must also be taken into consideration. Extraction of teeth and periodontal treatments were more in the 60-69 years age group, followed by the 70-79 years age group. The oral lesions and treatment needs of geriatric patients greatly vary according to each country, region, and even in hospitalized, institutionalized, and community patients^{18, 19}. The health of the oral cavity is very important to the quality of the life of all individuals. Elderly patients in this study utilize curative dental services more than preventive dental services. Visit to oral health centres by elderly patient is recommended for both preventive²⁰ and curative reasons.

4. CONCLUSION

There is a need for elderly individuals to visit dentists regularly even in absence of dental problems so that disease initiation can be recognized and prompt dental treatment can be rendered.

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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