

SERVING PATIENTS WITH SPECIAL CARE NEEDS : DENTAL PRACTICE REDEFINING.

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ABSTRACT

One of the neediest yet most underserved groups of dental patients today is the special needs population. This is a rather diverse group of children and adults, including those with disabilities—whether medical related, mental, or psychological—and those with physically handicapping conditions that require more than our routine approach to care.

About 500 million people worldwide are disabled. Nearly 2.1% of population of India is suffering from one or other kind of disability. Mentally disabled form 0.2% of total population and constitute 10.2% of total disabled. They have been reported with poor oral health status than the general population.

Patients with special needs are defined as “those patients with medical, physical, psychological, or social situations that make it necessary to modify normal dental routines in order to provide dental treatment for that individual. These individuals include, but are not limited to, people with developmental disabilities, complex medical problems, and significant physical limitations.”

This population of patients is reported to have higher rates of poor hygiene and, as a result, a greater incidence of gingivitis and

periodontitis, as well as caries, than members of the general population.

The subject of “special needs” patients in dentistry is a complicated one. Before beginning a specific conversation on the topic, a better term than “special needs” is required.

It's such a broad basket of conditions that are covered by the term special needs. So in India the term '**DIVYANG**' which means **DIVINE BODY**, has been suggested. It may seem that his term doesn't say very much and, on the other hand, it says far more than it means to say. We have a definitional problem that makes the discussion of the subject more difficult.

Providing dental care to patients with disabilities may require modifications to the traditional treatment plan. The main problem with the stereotyping of ‘special needs’ patients is the reinforced negativity or an anxiety on the part of dentists regarding treating such patients. This does a serious disservice to all kinds of mentally, physically, and medically disabled individuals and others who would perhaps fall within one's perception of ‘special needs’ patients. When you look at the different dental hygiene books that include chapters about

special needs, then it's really interesting as some say that even pregnant women are special needs patients. There is a lot of ambiguity about the term ‘special needs patients’ among dentists and dental hygienists.

Caring for patients with special needs requires pretreatment planning and proper assessment, including scheduling appointments for the appropriate time, performing a thorough medical/dental history in consultation with physicians, social workers and caretakers, and appropriate patient communication. The entire dental team should be educated about how to best care for patients with special needs so the initial impression is an inviting one. Obtaining informed consent and conducting proper documentation are essential prior to treatment. Care-givers, as well as patients, should be educated about nutrition and preventive oral care so that optimal oral health can be achieved and maintained.

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