

# How a Multidisciplinary Team can Best Improve the Oral Health of Older Adults

Strategies for effective communication and collaboration between healthcare professionals (HCPs), older adults, and their caregivers

## Why is oral health important in older adults?<sup>1</sup>



Older adults are at a high risk of undiagnosed/ underdiagnosed oral disease



But, according to the WHO, it is often neglected



Oral health prevention and promotion in routine medical assessment and care is, thus, essential

## Where do HCPs factor in?



HCPs treating older patients play a very important role in maintaining not only the patients' general health but also their oral health

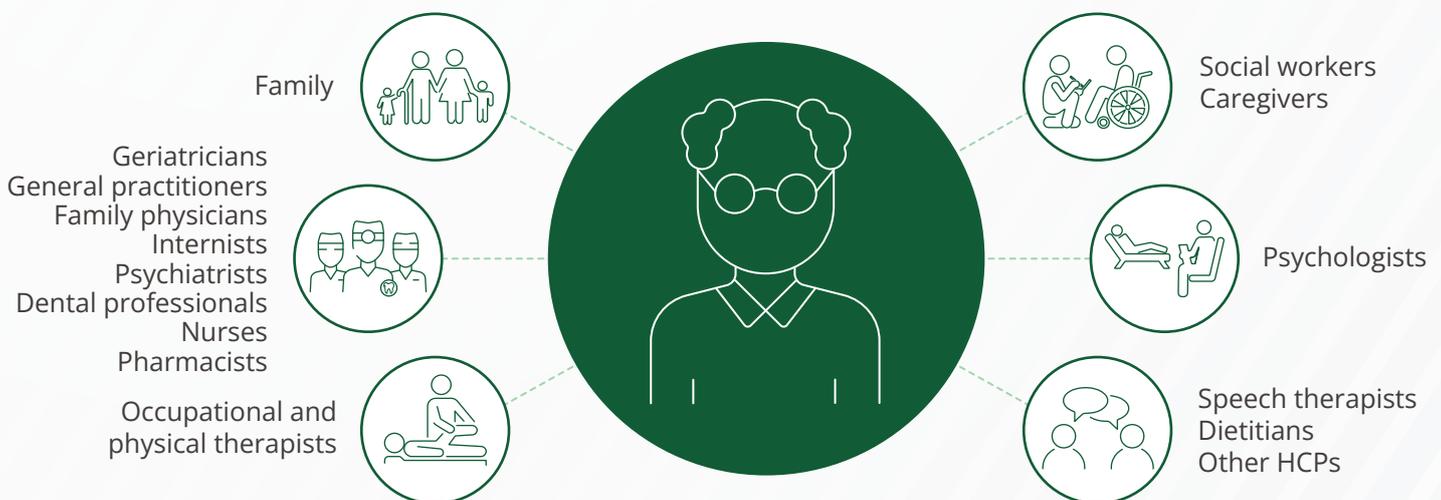
HCPs treating older patients (particularly geriatricians, elderly care physicians, and primary care physicians) should be involved in oral health screening of these older patients in practice, at home, and in institutional care<sup>2</sup>

They should understand, recognise, and judge the importance of dental disease, oral pathology, and functional impairment, offer oral health counseling to patients and their caregivers, manage oral conditions as appropriate, and refer patients to oral health professionals where needed<sup>1</sup>

Older adults need the delivery of patient-centered healthcare that is safe, timely, efficient, and effective<sup>1</sup>

For this, the involvement of a multidisciplinary HCP team (including dental practitioners) is needed<sup>1,3</sup>

## Who is involved in a multidisciplinary team and how do they work?<sup>1,3,4,5</sup>



The multidisciplinary team comes together, co-ordinates, shares information, and helps improve the general and oral health of older adults

## How can HCPs help?

- The inability to maintain an oral hygiene regimen is associated with rapid oral health deterioration (ROHD) in older adults
- HCPs can screen and check for ROHD in older adults



### Questions HCPs can ask to assess ROHD risk

1. Have you visited a dental professional in the past 12 months?
2. Is there anything bothering you in your mouth?
3. Does your mouth feel dry?
4. Do you have natural teeth, dentures, or both?
5. How often do you brush your teeth/dentures?
6. (If dentate) Do your gums bleed on brushing, eating, or spontaneously?



### HCPs can conduct an initial oral assessment in older adults using these validated tools<sup>1</sup>

- The Holistic and Reliable Oral Assessment Tool (THROAT)
- Brief Oral Health Status Examination (BOHSE)
- Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT)

### Factors to be assessed during screening<sup>1</sup>



- Oral pain
- Condition of oral structures (teeth, tongue, gums, mucosa, and lips)
- Oral cleanliness/malodour
- Chewing problems
- Swallowing ability
- Presence and condition of dentures or any dental prostheses
- Saliva

### After the screening, the HCPs can guide older adults on<sup>1</sup>



Daily hygiene and denture maintenance, if indicated



Frequent dental review



Smoking cessation, if necessary



Dietary advice



Limitation of alcohol consumption



Management of xerostomia

### What can HCPs do to help maintain older adults' oral health?<sup>6</sup>



- Recommend brushing twice daily
- Encourage the use of toothpaste with fluoride
- Recommend denture cleaning twice daily and removal of dentures at night
- Provide an individualised oral care plan
- Train carers in oral hygiene provision
- Discuss clinical photographs for motivation
- Stress the importance of supervised toothbrushing for persons with limited self-care ability
- Regularly schedule dental visits

### Finally, HCPs can provide timely referrals to oral HCPs, if their patients<sup>1</sup>

- Report a current oral complaint like pain in the mouth, bleeding gums, difficulty in eating, or xerostomia
- Do not clean their teeth and dentures at least once per day
- Have not had a dental visit in the past 12 months

Or, if an oral problem was recorded during the screening of the mouth and dentures

However, to achieve these outcomes, interdisciplinary teams need to collaborate and communicate effectively

## Importance of communication and coordination among HCPs in oral care for older adults<sup>2,3</sup>



Interprofessional collaboration between dental and non-dental HCPs is important



This was highlighted by two studies conducted in the Netherlands<sup>2,3</sup>



- The public oral health project, 'Don't forget the mouth!'
- The Oral Care Program

## How can interdisciplinary teams communicate and collaborate better?<sup>4,5</sup>

Have a shared goal-setting and care process

Share important information with all stakeholders across the team

Have an active stream of communication between all stakeholders

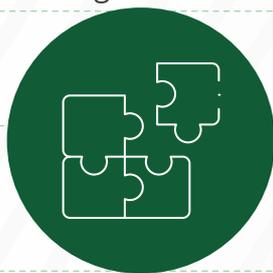
Have group discussions for decision-making and care planning

# Shared decision-making (SDM)<sup>7</sup>

All stakeholders in the interdisciplinary care team, including the older adults themselves, should be involved in decisions concerning the older adults' healthcare

## Create a knowledge base

For the assessment and clinical treatment of geriatric syndromes



## Facilitate communication

For the effective management of oral health

## Collaborate and cooperate

To formulate a better oral healthcare plan

## Identify discussion partners

To engage in goal-oriented talks and use assessment tools

## Engage the patient

To provide specific instructions for individual-based treatment

## Engage in multilevel collaboration

With students and professionals engaged in the healthcare industry

## Train

With experience-based training modules



## SDM may prove more challenging in older adults with cognitive decline, special health needs, and multimorbidities, or those requiring complex care

In such situations, a carer or an advocate should be identified and can be involved in SDM on behalf of the older adult

## Conclusions

- ✓ Older adults may be particularly prone to poor oral health
- ✓ Poor oral health in older, frail adults can increase the risk of RODH
- ✓ HCPs across the spectrum of care must, therefore, be aware of the oral health of older adults they may be treating
- ✓ All HCPs should appreciate the importance of initial oral screening and include oral health assessment as part of routine medical assessment
- ✓ Outcomes of initial screening should be used for evaluating the future course of treatment or be used as a guide for referral
- ✓ Communication and coordination between a multidisciplinary team of HCPs can ensure the timely delivery of care to older adults
- ✓ Older adults with sensory impairments require special considerations for effective communication and conveyance of treatment
- ✓ SDM is especially important to maintain the oral health of older adults and requires a guided, systematic approach

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