

Access to Oral Health Resources for Children with Special Needs

Concern

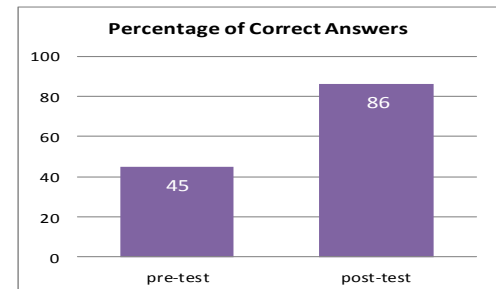
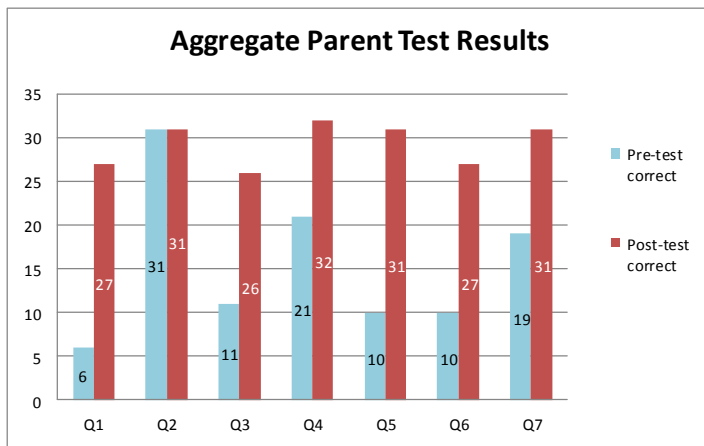
Children with special healthcare needs often also have special oral health needs. Oral health concerns can rise from congenital malformations; difficulty with brushing and flossing; medication-induced dry mouth; etc. Parents/caregivers, overwhelmed with the child's everyday care, often overlook the importance of oral health care, and/or are unaware of the resources available to them.

Project Parameters

In an effort to increase awareness of and access to appropriate oral health education and referral sources for children with special needs, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego's Anderson Center for Dental Care identified and

selected local special needs parent support groups for evaluation. Parents' knowledge of oral health and resources available to improve/enhance and maintain the oral health and overall health of children with special needs would be determined. The randomly chosen support groups were: EFRC Autism Parent Support Group; Chula Vista CHADD Branch Support Group and San Diego City Schools Special Needs Support Group.

Support groups were offered a one-hour presentation during a regular group meeting. Following an introduction, parents were asked to complete a survey. A presentation followed, after which they were asked the same questions to determine increase in knowledge and/or awareness. Results are shown below.



Results

Pre-presentation survey results showed that parents' knowledge of their child's oral health, as well as resources available to them, was limited. Although they were well aware of some items, they had little knowledge of others of equal importance.

Following the presentation, attendees were much more aware of oral health concerns and possible solutions.

Conclusion

Early intervention is key, especially for children with special needs. The more their parents are aware of their oral health needs, the more likely it is that they will be able to avoid costly and painful dental disease. They also need to know that their child's oral health can affect their overall health and exacerbate their medical concerns.

For the past 16 years, the Anderson Center has provided education and advocacy for children with special needs. The need for education of both parents, caregivers and professionals continues.

For resources and referral to dentists who treat children with special needs, call 800-788-9029, or see below.

- Q1.** Children with special needs have the same risk of decay that typical children have.
- Q2.** Dental disease can affect children with special needs overall health.
- Q3.** Children with special needs deal with same oral hygiene challenges as other children of same age.
- Q4.** Systemic conditions can reflect in the mouth.
- Q5.** Putting baby to bed with a sippy cup is better than putting him to bed with a bottle.
- Q6.** Oral health is one of the unmet needs when referring to children with special needs.
- Q7.** First dental visit should be at 3 years of age.

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