

Opportunistic Oral Health Care with Silver Fluoride in a Medically Supervised Injecting Room

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Introduction:

People who inject drugs (PWID) often have poor dentition, resulting in pain in the mouth, bacterial infections which can spread to other parts of the body, reduced the capacity to eat healthily, and a change in appearance. As a result, oral health is a high priority for PWID. The location of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) in a community health centre with an oral health programme offered the opportunity to offer oral health care to people using the MSIR. Silver fluoride is a chemical alternative to a filling that has been used extensively in children and elderly, but seldom outside that setting.

Method / Approach

An oral health care approach was designed offering opportunistic sessions with an oral health technician in the MSIR where an oral health survey was conducted and on the spot treatment with silver fluoride was offered when appropriate. Clients were then invited to have further dental work at the community health centre.

Key Findings:

101 MSIR clients took up the option for oral health care assessments prior to COVID restrictions. 76% had at least one decayed tooth, and 41% had more than 5 decayed teeth. 38% of clients received silver fluoride. 55% required at least one extraction. 47% attended the dental clinic for follow-up including for extractions, fillings, and in a small number of cases, dentures. 2/4 clients who received dentures found employment within weeks.

Discussions and Conclusions:

A high proportion of clients were happy to have opportunistic oral health screening and silver fluoride treatment.

Implications for Practice

Oral health can be incorporated into the treatment and care of PWID and could have a profoundly positive effect on quality of life. Silver fluoride is potentially underutilised in this client group and would benefit from further research. It may also be useful in other settings where full dental care is not available.

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