

What are the fears, thoughts, and barriers to oral health care for children with disabilities in Ireland? - A parents' perspective using focus groups and qualitative analysis.

Aims 1) To explore the parents' perceived needs and experiences in providing oral care for their child with special needs. 2) To use this information to design a health promotion package for these children.

Design and Methods: A purposive sample of parents of 0-6 year old children with disabilities assigned to 2 early Intervention Centers in Ireland were invited to take part in the focus group discussions. 3 focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed.

Results: The dental Professional is the only healthcare worker that is not involved in the healthcare of this age group of children with disabilities. Despite a huge range of healthcare workers from dieticians to speech therapists to public health nurses, no healthcare worker has ever discussed the oral health of their child except when there was a dental emergency. Parents admit that oral health is important to them but due to more immediate commitments of nutrition, communication, and mobility they have placed oral health down the list of priorities. Parents are concerned that if they had an oral health query they would have no point of contact. Most parents felt that their child would need specialist dental care in the future.

Conclusions: This study highlights the need for dental collaboration with the whole healthcare team starting with the Early Intervention team that would then be carried right through to the adult life of the child with disabilities. Introducing the dental team at this early stage would reduce a lot of parents' fears and avoid the placing of oral health to the bottom of the healthcare list. This in turn should reduce the unnecessary pressures on the specialist dental lists as the child grows up as parents and patients will be introduced to oral health promotion and prevention

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Dr. Alison Dougall for her advice during this project.