

Title: What should dental services for people with disabilities be like? The results of an Irish Delphi Panel survey.

1. Introduction

For many years research in Ireland has described poorer outcomes from oral diseases and their treatment among people with disabilities (Crowley et al., 2005, Costello, 1990, Holland and O'Mullane, 1990, Elliot et al., 2005, Mac Giolla Phadraig et al., 2014). Examples of poor outcomes include extraction rather than filling of decayed teeth, increased severity and extent of gum disease and a lack of functional replacement of lost teeth when people lose teeth or become edentulous. Possible contributing factors include a lack of appropriately designed service models (Elliot et al., 2005). A review of primary care dental services found inconsistent targeting of "Special Needs" groups across the country with great variability. This report suggested a need for evidence based service models for people with disabilities across Ireland (PA Consulting Group, 2010).

This project used a Delphi panel consensus process, as a first step to evidence based service models, to agree goals for dental services for people with disabilities. The term Delphi Method owes its origin to the fabled Oracle of Delphi. It is described as a structured group communication process that allows the production of information for decision-making (Adler and Ziglio, 1996). This allows an expert group to resolve complex problems with the goal of producing useful guidance and opinions for decision makers (Cramer et al., 2008). The Delphi method has been used in oral healthcare research for some time and is a popular and acceptable means of answering questions of clinical, educational and policy issues in oral health care (Cramer et al., 2008). According to Hsu and Sanford the Delphi technique is often designed for the purpose of goal setting, policy investigation, or predicting the occurrence of future events, attempting to address "what could/should be" (Hsu and Sandford, 2007). Jones et al. developed goals for disability specific services through a Delphi process in a residential care setting (Jones et al., 2000). The Delphi method has never been used to identify broader goals of oral health services for people with disabilities until now.

1.1 Aim

This study aimed to develop a prioritised set of goals for oral health services for people with disabilities in Ireland.

1.2 Research question

What is expert consensus on priorities for oral health services for people with disabilities, in an Irish setting?