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Dementia guidance please

Lin, Yen Ming

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Dementia, Oral Health and COVID 19: Our Experience

Dear Sir,

The current Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted access to healthcare with elective appointments being cancelled and members of the public being urged to attend only when all attempts at remote triaging have failed to resolve a healthcare issue. Similarly, in a primary care setting this has affected routine appointments for oral health care, particularly for dementia patients who are from a vulnerable and elderly background. Our experience here in a community dental service has shown that provision of domiciliary visits to care homes have come to an abrupt halt due to the increased risks associated with Covid-19 in an enclosed setting as well as the change in provision of care as we turn into an urgent dental centre.

850000 people in the UK are currently living with dementia; this figure is estimated to rise to 1.6 million by 2040.¹ People with dementia have an increased oral health need but a number of barriers exist creating difficulties for this group accessing dental care.² The relationship between good oral health, general health and quality of life is one which is well established.³ Thus, maintenance of good oral health for this patient population is paramount.

The Covid-19 guidance and SOP document⁴ published by NHS England highlights that vulnerable patients may be seen for urgent dental care following unsuccessful implementation of remote management via advice, analgesia and antimicrobials, however there is no further guidance regarding the factors to consider during a domiciliary visit and this is left to the individual clinician to risk assess and decide. This document has changed three times since it was first published in April 2020, and the guidance changing numerous times during this period can leave a lack of clarity and thus inconsistencies in the provision of care.

I would greatly urge that there needs to be clearer guidance for domiciliary visits in order to provide effective and safe care to the dementia patient cohort as significant risks leading to potential safeguarding issues and increased comorbidities can arise if these issues are not addressed.

References

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Y. Lin, B. Collard, Plymouth, UK