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Oral health: An essential component of pediatric nursing practice

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Abstract

Oral disease is pandemic in regions across the world. In Canada and the United States, dental caries is the number one pediatric chronic health disease. Oral health is an essential component of total health and can be a reliable and expedient indicator of general health. Dental disease can influence a child's ability to speak, eat, and socialize and has been linked with heart disease, diabetes, asthma, pneumonia, and stroke. Despite this evidence, oral health care has not been emphasized in pediatric nursing. Recent studies have shown that, traditionally, the focus of pediatric oral health care has been on hygiene and dental caries, and this misconception by nurses has perhaps been one of the greatest barriers to oral health care in children and adolescents. The purpose of this presentation is to explore the factors influencing pediatric oral health and to describe the collaboration of the Colleges of Nursing and Dentistry within the Caring for Kids Where They Live program, which has been implemented in three Mid-Western Canadian schools. Integrating oral health care into the pediatric clinical nursing practicum has been highly successful as evidenced by identification and intervention of multiple urgent oral health problems and other important health issues. Details of the pediatric oral health assessment guide, follow-up, and referral processes will be discussed. Nurses are encouraged to support an approach to pediatric nursing practice that includes oral health care as an essential component of overall health and wellness.

Biography

Shelley Spurr is an assistant Professor in the College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Her dissertation was titled "Student Perceptions of Adolescent Wellness" and was completed in 2009. She has over 15 years' experience working in pediatrics including, acute care, home care, public health, and nursing education. She has published 8 papers in reputed journals and presented at many regional and national conferences. She is engaged in research regarding the promotion of wellness and oral health in schools, student perceptions of healthy bodies, peer and parental relationships, and the influence of media on adolescent body image.

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