

Parent Perspectives on Dental Participation in a Multidisciplinary Care Clinic

Sophia E. Altenburg, DDS, Karen Foster, DDS



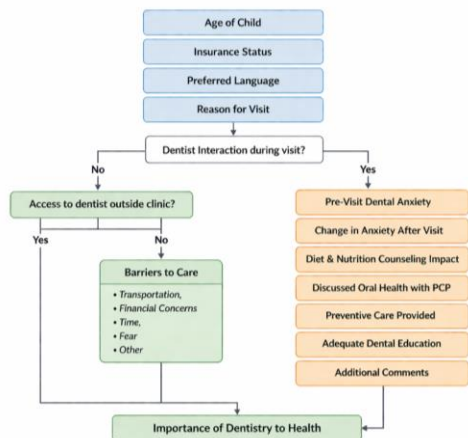
BACKGROUND

Children with complex medical and social needs face significant barriers to accessing dental care. Integration of dental services into multidisciplinary care clinics may improve access and family experience. This study aimed to evaluate parent and caregiver perceptions of dental involvement within a multidisciplinary setting and highlight parent perspectives on the value and impact of integrating dental services with other medical-related appointments. It hopes to help inform future multidisciplinary care models aimed at improving oral health access and family-centered care for children with complex medical and social needs. Additionally, it aims to highlight the importance of medical-dental integration, especially for the most vulnerable patient populations.

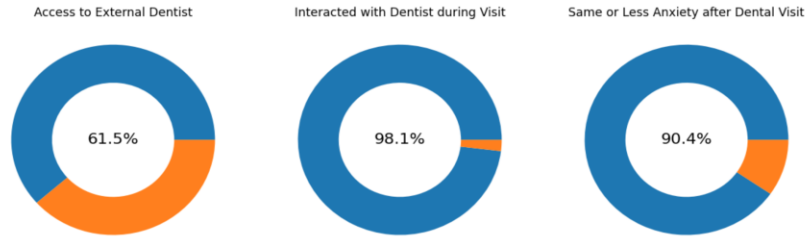
METHODS

A cross-sectional, anonymous, paper format survey was administered to parents and caregivers of patients attending a complex care clinic. The survey, consisting of both closed and open-ended questions, was available in English and Spanish and included questions on demographics, access and barriers to dental care, perceived importance of dentistry to overall health, dental anxiety, and satisfaction with dental education and preventive dental measures. A total of 52 surveys were collected. The data was analyzed using qualitative and descriptive statistics.

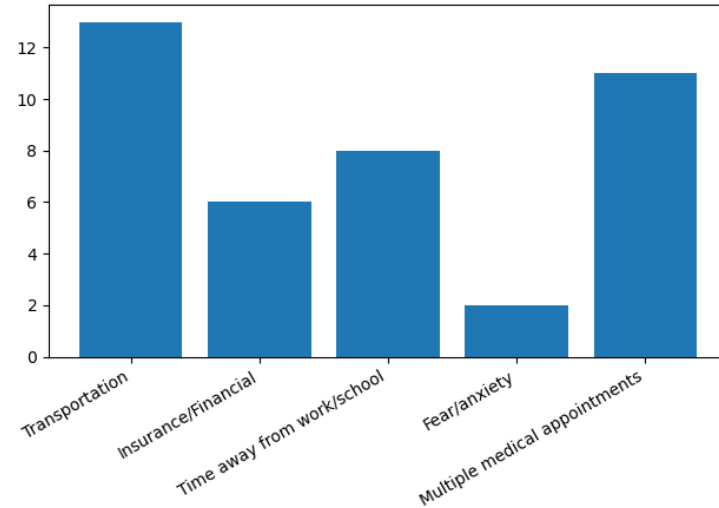
Complex Care Clinic Caregiver Survey – Question Tree



RESULTS



Reported Barriers to Care



CONCLUSIONS

Integration of dental services within a multidisciplinary care clinic was associated with highly positive caregiver-reported outcomes, including strong perceived importance of dentistry, adequate dental education, and reduced or stable dental anxiety following visits. Incorporation of oral health discussions by primary care providers further supports integration of medical and dental care, reinforcing a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to managing the needs of children with complex medical conditions.

Despite these favorable in-clinic experiences, a majority of caregivers reported lack of access to an external dentist, highlighting persistent structural barriers to care. Transportation challenges, competing medical appointments, and time constraints were the most commonly reported obstacles.

These findings suggest that multidisciplinary care models may improve access, caregiver experience, and perceived value of dental care for children with complex medical needs. It is important for dental services to be a part of comprehensive care and for dentistry to be an available service in a hospital setting. However, ongoing efforts are needed to address barriers outside the clinical setting and to support continuity of dental care beyond the multidisciplinary clinic.

REFERENCES

- American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. (2024). Management of dental patients with special health care needs. The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry, 343–350.
- AMA Journal of Ethics. (2022). Ethical considerations in providing dental care to patients with special needs. AMA J Ethics, 24(1), E33–40.
- Hamagea, H., Couturier, Y., Shrivastava, R., Girard, F., & Bedos, C. (2017). Barriers and facilitators in the integration of oral health into primary care: a scoping review. BMJ Open, 7(9), e016078.
- Maxey, H. L. (2021). The integration of oral health into primary care: A strategic pathway toward improving population health. Journal of the American Dental Association, 152(12), 1014–1020.
- Mouradian, W. E., Corbin, S. B., & the Center for Health Workforce Studies. (2003). Addressing health disparities through dental-medical collaborations, Part I. Journal of Dental Education, 67(12), 1320–1326.
- Nowak, A. J. (2002). Patients with special health care needs in pediatric dental practices. Pediatric Dentistry, 24(3), 227–228. PMID: 12064496.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my faculty mentors, Karen Foster, DDS and Scott Hamilton, DDS, and to my program director, Jeffrey Kahl, DDS, for their guidance and support throughout this project. I would like to acknowledge Angela Yoder for her assistance and expertise in analyzing the collected data. Their insights were essential to the successful completion of this study.