ADULT CARIES RISK ASSESSMENT PRACTICES & FLUORIDE VARNISH USE AMONG DENTAL HYGIENISTS

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Problem Statement: Evidence-based guidelines for in-office fluoride treatments have been established. Yet, there is limited information about the actual frequency of professionally applied fluoride varnish and adult patient acceptance of this product.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to obtain information from practicing Dental Hygienists related to their caries risk assessment practices (formal vs informal), the frequency of fluoride varnish use, and actual patient acceptance.

Methods: Dental hygienists, who are members of their professional organization, were invited to participate in a web-based survey designed to obtain this information. This study used a survey research design and descriptive statistics to analyze the data. IRB approval was obtained to conduct the study.

Results: Thirty nine respondents participated in the survey (N=39). The majority of the participants (n=??; 66.67%) reported conducting a dental caries risk assessment on adult patients. The majority of the assessments were conducted “informally” (n=??; 85.7%). The results also showed that approximately half of the hygienists (n=??; 51.28%) offer topical fluoride treatment to their low-risk patients; the majority of hygienists reported offering fluoride varnish to their moderate risk patients (n=??; 64.1%) and high risk caries patients (n=??; 76.92%). The vast majority of hygienists reported they apply fluoride varnish (vs other fluoride forms) on their adult patients (93.94%). Hygienists also indicated that two to three patients per day refuse fluoride (40%) and that the related expense was the primary reason for refusal (n=??; 64.71%).

Conclusions: Caries risk assessment is frequently conducted by dental hygienists, but on an informal basis. The cost of fluoride treatment is a major barrier that prevents adults from receiving professionally applied fluoride treatment.