

**Knowledge and Attitude of Oral Health Care of Children among General Practitioners in Mangaluru****Sham S Bhat<sup>1</sup>, Sundeep Hegde K.<sup>2</sup>, Faseel Abdul Rahiman<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Background:** The medical office is considered an opportune site to reach large number of children. General practitioners can assess risk dental problems and counsel parents and children about the prevention of these problems. A key element of comprehensive care for children thus involves the coordination of services between medical and dental providers so that the appropriate health care professionals can provide appropriate services at the appropriate age.

**Methodology:** Printed questionnaire was distributed to general practitioners in Mangaluru regarding, their knowledge and attitude of oral health care of children among general practitioners in Mangaluru.

**Results:** The findings suggest that general practitioners are knowledgeable about some aspects of oral health care. The majority of general practitioners considered their role in children's oral health care as important. However, a reported lack of dental knowledge and training appeared to pose barriers, limiting general practitioners from playing a more active role.

**Conclusion:** The dental surgeon undergoes basic medical training including a thorough knowledge of head and neck anatomy; similarly the medical fraternity should be trained in the implementation of oral health .Education program related to infant oral health can improve the oral health knowledge and attitude of the general practitioners regarding pediatric dentistry.

**Keywords:** General practitioners, Knowledge and attitude, Oral health care.

**INTRODUCTION**

Dental caries is still considered as a common dental disease despite of tremendous improvement in dental and oral status. One of the key factor which affects the preventive dentistry performance is in relation with knowledge and function of the medical doctors concerning this issue. First dental visit is one of the crucial aspects in child's general care. The first dental visit establishes the quality of preventive and the future oral health care. Recommendations for early dental visits for children is when the first tooth erupts.<sup>1</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends the first dental visit by the age of 1 and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that a dental

home be established by age 1 for those children at caries risk.<sup>2</sup>

Appropriate health care professionals can provide appropriate services at the appropriate age when done in coordination with medical and dental health care professionals, which is an important element in comprehensive care for children.<sup>4</sup>

Parent's contact with health professionals during their child's first year of life is mostly with their primary care physician thus physician role in educating and motivating parents in regards to oral health care will have a beneficiary impact on the child.<sup>2</sup>

An inventory of oral health training confirms that most physicians are not well trained in

oral health. Furthermore, even though physicians believe they should provide dental screening for children, the majority do not screen for early tooth decay, an important indicator of future caries risk.<sup>2</sup>

Not many studies have been conducted in Mangaluru city regarding the attitude of general practitioners on oral health status of children.

This study was conducted in the city of Mangaluru, designed keeping in mind to gather the data on the level of knowledge of pediatric dentistry, importance of the first dental visit, and referrals to a specialist for dental care.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### ***Inclusion criteria***

-General Practitioners (MBBS) in and around Mangaluru.

### ***Exclusion criteria***

-Post graduate students

### ***Sample size***

-150

Self administered short printed questionnaires was distributed personally by the examiner to general practitioners in Mangaluru, regarding their knowledge and attitude of oral health care of children and paediatric dentistry.

The items were evaluated through choosing one of the options completely, yes or no. The questionnaire was categorized into three sections;

1. The approach of the practitioner towards pediatric dentistry and factors affecting it.
2. The knowledge level of the practice of pediatric dentistry in relation to age of first dental visit, maternal considerations, preventive therapies and other treatments for oral health care. Importance regarding early childhood caries (ECC), cariogenic affect medicated syrup on teeth.
3. Training on oral health received by the practitioner were recorded and willingness to receive training.

## **Statistical Analysis**

The obtained data was analyzed using chi square test.

## **RESULT**

The approach of the practitioners showed that more than 90% of general practitioners knew the existence of the specialty and 84% of the practitioners understood the importance of the primary dentition.

|  | <b>Yes %</b> | <b>no %</b> | <b>total</b> |
|--|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Training on oral                                 | 60.2         | 39.8        | 150          |
| Willingness to receive oral health care training | 90.9         | 9.1         | 150          |
| Existence of an exclusive specialty              | 90.9         | 9.1         | 150          |
| Importance of primary teeth                      | 84.1         | 15.9        | 150          |
| Examining of primary teeth                       | 62.5         | 37.5        | 150          |
| Importance of referral                           | 79.5         | 20.5        | 150          |
| Parent not preferring referral                   | 63.6         | 36.4        | 150          |
| Parent may feel primary teeth are not important  | 65.9         | 34.1        | 150          |

In this study 63% examined primary teeth. It was noted that around 63% of the general practitioners felt that the parents will pose a barrier in the referral and around 65% felt primary dentition is not important.

The knowledge and understanding of the health care providers showed that 85% of the general practitioners could relate the importance of breast feeding and oral health.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends the first dental visit by the age of one. There was decrease in the percentage with respect to the knowledge of the age of first dental visit which was 31%.

Knowledge on preventive care regard to dental caries was about 88% and knowledge of early childhood caries (ECC) was of 67%.

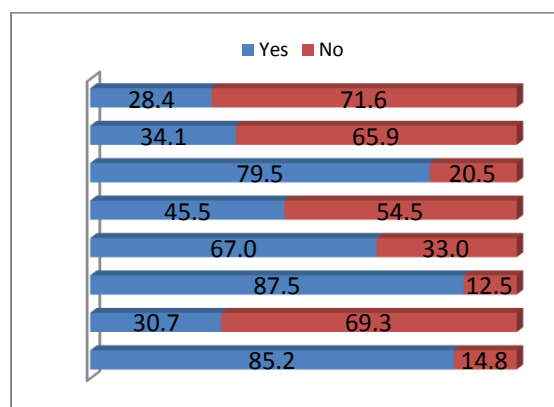
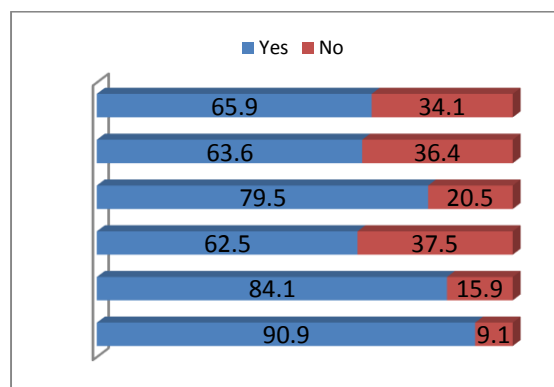
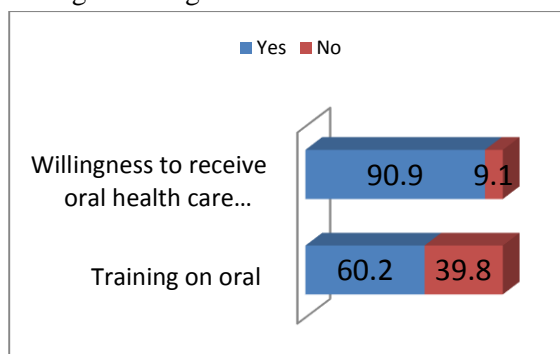
Pediatric dentists as trained professionals in treating handicapped children were acknowledged only by 34% of the general practitioners.

Only 28% of general practitioners acknowledged the carcinogenicity of medicated syrups prescribed in their practice.

The third part of the questionnaire dealt with the knowledge level of the practitioners.

In that only 60% of general practitioners had received training in oral health.

90% of the practitioners were willing to undergo training in oral health.



|  | Yes            |      | No             |      | Total |
|--|----------------|------|----------------|------|-------|
|  | No. of doctors | %    | No. of doctors | %    |       |
| Relation between breastfeeding and oral health       | 128            | 85.2 | 22             | 14.8 | 150   |
| Age of first dental visit                            | 46             | 30.7 | 104            | 69.3 | 150   |
| Preventive care with regard to dental caries         | 131            | 87.5 | 19             | 12.5 | 150   |
| Knowledge of early childhood caries                  | 101            | 67.0 | 49             | 33.0 | 150   |
| Early intervention to orthodontic                    | 68             | 45.5 | 82             | 54.5 | 150   |
| Management of cleft lip and palate                   | 119            | 79.5 | 31             | 20.5 | 150   |
| Pediatric dentists are trained for handicap children | 51             | 34.1 | 99             | 65.9 | 150   |
| Cariogenicity of medicated syrup                     | 43             | 28.4 | 107            | 71.6 | 150   |

## DISCUSSION

This survey was done to highlight the fact that there is a need to improve the relationship between general practitioners and the pedodontist and to emphasize on the areas where the practitioners need to improve their knowledge regarding oral health care and to recognize the importance of pedodontist.

More than 90% of general practitioners knew the existence of the specialty and 84% of the practitioners understood the importance of the primary dentition. Even though physicians

believe they should provide dental screening for children, the majority do not screen for early tooth decay, an important indicator of future caries risk.<sup>2</sup> Sanchez et.al reported that 83% of physicians performed oral examinations during children's physical examinations.<sup>13</sup> In this study 63% examined primary teeth. It was noted that around 63% of the general practitioners felt that the parents will pose a barrier in the referral and around 65% felt primary dentition is not important.

Appropriate breastfeeding is recognized as the best feeding method for infants. However, nocturnal breastfeeding, at will-breast feeding, and weaning delayed beyond the age of 2 years could all have a harmful effect on dentition similar to that produced by bottle feeding.<sup>13</sup>

The knowledge and understanding of the health care providers showed that 85% of the general practitioners could relate the importance of breast feeding and oral health. During breast feeding that's during suckling the infants' oral muscles are exercised strenuously which have an important effect on the thrust and growth of the mandible, in addition to imparting maternal immunological components.

Health care professionals should encourage breast feeding in order to support health promoting practices.

The general practitioners need to emphasize that the oral hygiene, duration of breast feeding in association with a pediatrician and preventive methods are necessary to decrease the possibility of dental caries.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends the first dental visit by the age of one. There was decrease in the percentage with respect to the knowledge of the age of first dental visit which was 31%.<sup>2</sup>

Knowledge on preventive care regard to dental caries was about 88% and knowledge of early childhood caries (ECC) was of 67%.

It's shown that Children with ECC are three times more likely to develop dental caries in the permanent dentition.<sup>1</sup>

Pediatric dentists as trained professionals in handling handicapped children were acknowledged only by 34% of the general practitioners.

The importance of early referral to a pediatric dentist is important and necessary to improve oral health status as the specialty specializes in patient control, caries preventive therapies management under general anesthesia, special gingival care involving children, especially under anti-convulsion therapy, dental trauma

protection and early intervention orthodontics to have acceptable and functional occlusion.

Only 28% of general practitioners acknowledged the carcinogenicity of medicated syrups prescribed in their practice.

A study done in Brazil showed that around 56% of the medicated syrups had a high sugar concentration, with pH values below the critical value and high acidity values, all of them increase the cariogenic and erosive potential.<sup>11</sup>

The third part of the questionnaire dealt with the knowledge level of the practitioners.

In that only 60% of general practitioners had received training in oral health.

90% of the practitioners were willing to undergo training in oral health.

The most common barrier to participation in oral health-related activities in their practices was lack of training. most of the practitioners have not received any oral health education in medical school, residency, or continuing education.

Shiraz Usman et al study showed that medical and paramedical students showed poor oral health knowledge comparatively and Oral health hardly receives any exposure in the medical and paramedical curriculum; hence oral health education must be included in pre-clinical curriculum of medical and paramedical courses.<sup>12</sup>

More studies on a larger sample size are needed to substantiate the present study.

## **CONCLUSION**

The dental surgeon undergoes basic medical training including a thorough knowledge of head and neck anatomy; similarly the medical fraternity can be trained in the implementation of oral health. The oral health knowledge and behavior of the general practitioners can be enhanced through oral health education programme.

With the results obtained from this study the following can be suggested.

1. Collaboration between pediatric dentists and practitioners for implementation of oral health education programs.
2. Promote oral examination of new born by a pedodontist soon after birth.
3. Promotion of healthy referral practice.
4. Promote the need for increased specialty dental care for special children.

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