

VERMONT LEGAL AID

Long Term Care Ombudsman Project

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House Committee on Human Services
S.20
January 20, 2016

I offer this testimony in support of S.20, a bill to establish and regulate licensed dental practitioners.

We support this bill because we believe it will increase long term care residents' access to dental services and thus improve their overall health and quality of life.

A recent study shows that a significant number of nursing home residents in Vermont have poor oral health. Between July 2013 and January 2014, the Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the Department of Health surveyed 342 residents in 20% of Vermont's nursing homes. (A summary of the study results is on the reverse side.)

The study found that among all residents surveyed:

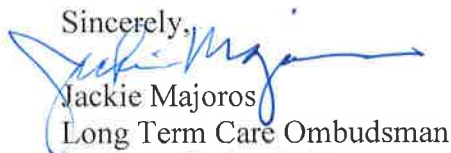
- 41.9% needed dental care
- 8.1% needed urgent care (within 48 hours)
- 33.8% needed care (within several weeks)

Among those with residents with teeth, the study found that:

- 48.3% had untreated teeth decay
- 80% had severe gum inflammation
- 70% had substantial oral debris in their mouths
- 57% were in need of gum care.

Federal and state law requires nursing homes to provide routine or emergency dental care or to obtain that care from an outside source. We believe that this bill will create a new, flexible, affordable option that will help facilities meet this requirement.

Sincerely,



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Assessing oral health status of Vermont nursing home residents: Findings and implications



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INTRODUCTION

Vermont has the second oldest population nationally, yet this is the first time the burden of oral disease among older adults has been measured in Vermont. National data from CDC suggests that many older adults have poor oral health and that living in nursing homes increases risk for poor oral health and its associated health outcomes. This study was conducted to assess the oral health status of Vermont nursing home residents.

METHODS

Site selection was through weighted random sampling and 20% of long-term care facilities within the state were chosen; residents were selected within sites through quota sampling (N=342). Two registered dental hygienists conducted screenings between July 2013 and January 2014 using the Association for State and Territorial Dental Directors' Older Adult Basic Screening Survey.

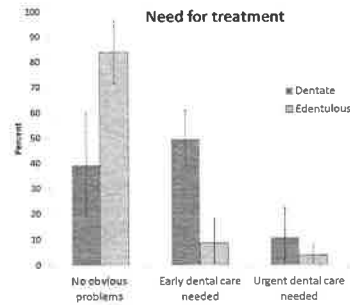


RESULTS



Tooth Loss

38.5% of participants did not have any natural teeth. Among the dentate participants the mean number of teeth was 16.5. The count for number of teeth includes root fragments (found in 43.1%), which do not serve a purpose for chewing, and obviously loose teeth (found in 11.4% of dentate participants).



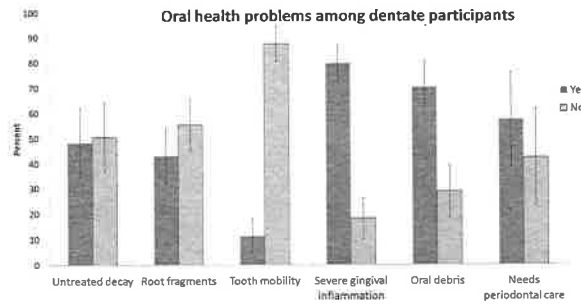
Need for Treatment

Among the residents surveyed, a combined 41.9% required dental care with 8.1% needing urgent care (within 48 hours) and 33.8% needing care early (within the next several weeks), with greater need among dentate participants.

Among dentate participants 48.3% had untreated decay. In addition, nearly 80% of dentate residents had severe gingival inflammation, more than 70% had substantial oral debris, and 57% were in need of periodontal (gum) care.

Denture Use

Overall, 47.2% of all participants required either full or partial removable dentures. Among edentulous participants, 24.3% did not have dentures. Even among those with dentures, 13.5% of participants with upper dentures and 25.5% of participants with lower dentures did not wear them when eating.



CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study confirm the presence of oral health issues among nursing home residents in Vermont. They suggest that Vermont could benefit from adopting a systemic approach to improving dental care in nursing homes, including increased collaboration between medical and dental providers, community health centers, and other stakeholders, as well as training nursing home staff on the importance of oral health.

One nursing home used the findings from this study to develop a system to improve residents' oral health using the social ecological approach. This could be expanded to additional sites around the state.

Integrated approach to oral health in nursing homes



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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