

DENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN HOSPITAL

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The oral health of children is very much an important part of total health. However, given the importance of oral health it is surprising that in many hospitals in Australia there is almost no routine dental service provided. Some major hospitals do have a full-time dental service, notably several paediatric hospitals, but most large general hospitals provide only emergency care or a limited general care service. The emergency dental care usually covers major trauma and limited treatment of routine dental problems such as relief of pain and repair of prostheses. The provision of preventive advice ranges from infant feeding practices & how to care for the teeth of children right through to the older population where the care of natural and artificial teeth is most often neglected.

From the paediatric point of view, the provision of good dental services for children in hospital can contribute significantly to the overall health of children as well to the diagnosis of many medical conditions, that would otherwise pass unnoticed. The neglect of the mouth, as evidenced by significant dental decay or damage to the teeth of a young child, can be a definitive indicator of abuse, whether it is social, physical or sexual. Physical and sexual abuse have oro-facial manifestations that are well recognisable to the dental clinician & careful oral examination has in many situations been the first indicator of these. Another one of the key areas for dental involvement is with children who have significant oral side-effects due to their neoplastic medication and/or radiation. These side effects can be minimised by comprehensive dental care. Similarly, children who are immune suppressed following organ transplant can ill afford a focus of oral infection and their satisfactory dental condition prior to transplantation is essential.

Oral health is a key part of total health and must not be neglected in the hospital environment, during both inpatient care (either short or long stay) and outpatients care.