Dental Care for Patients in their Later Years
Challenges and Strategies

Advanced Pediatric Dentistry Seminar

Janet A Yellowitz, DMD, MPH
Director, Geriatric Dentistry
Director, Special Care
University of MD Dental School
jyellowitz@umaryland.edu
Overview: Older Adults

Who are they?

What’s different about them?

Why do older adults seek care?
  • Don’t wait for pain to see the dentist

Impact of cognitive impairment on practice
  • Treatment planning & behavioral strategies
  • Caregiver concerns
Its a demographic revolution!!

older adults are growing faster than any age group
heterogeneous

No two systems age at the same rate.
There is no single, simple pattern to human aging.
Baby Boomers

- Aware of prevention
- Information savvy
- Often demanding
- Expect options
- Little info about aging

85+

- Lived through WWII & Depression
- Depression not in vocabulary
- Lose your teeth by 40
- “the big C”
Older Adults

- Physiologic changes
  - Slower, gravity takes over
  - EXCEPT Salivary glands

- Greater risk for pathology & inflammation
  - More disabilities, medications, reactions
  - Undiagnosed disease(s)

- Cognitive changes
  - Individual and caregiver
• **Slow Loss of Physiologic Reserve**

- Immunocompetence declines
  - less quick & less efficient

- Body reserves decrease
  - lung capacity
  - heart contractility, vessels…

- As age increases, changes increase
  - Postural hypotension
  - Geriatric dosages
Immunosenescence
Immunologic aging

• Primary cause for autoimmune diseases, infection susceptibility, morbidity and mortality with advancing age
  – Pneumonia, UTI and skin infections
  – Recurrent infections

• **RISK FACTORS:** Genetics, stress, viral infections, sociodemographic factors, unhealthy habits, comorbidities, medications, malnutrition, exercise & more
Diseases present differently in older adults

- Common diseases have uncommon presentation
  - Myocardial infarction
  - Periodontal disease
  - Headache
  - Appendicitis
    - Presentation is absent or very slight

- Vague & non-specific symptoms
  - Refusing to eat or drink, falling, incontinence
Oral health and oral diseases

- Often more complex
- Nothing is common
- Range from good to no maintenance
- May have a greater impact on general health
- Impacts their quality of life
Aging Teeth

- **Secondary dentin** – uneven pulp chamber; obturation of dentinal tubules.
- **Pulp** changes from cell-rich and fiber poor – to cell poor and fiber rich;
  - fewer arteries and blood vessel
- **Result:** - less reparative capacity
  - decreased capacity to respond

Less PAIN !!!
Treatment Planning Considerations

- No “perceived need” for care
- Lack of pain/discomfort
- Physical limitations
- Medical conditions
- Fear
- Functional dependence
- The cost of dental care
- Transportation problems
- Life expectancy

PREVENTION is KEY
Oral Health Care Services for Older Adults: A Looming Crisis

Dean, Columbia University School of Dental and Oral Surgery

The article that appears here was published originally as an editorial in the May 2004 American Journal of Public Health, a publication of the American Public Health Association. It is reprinted here with permission of the APHA, which holds the copyright on the article.

TWO IMPORTANT ORAL HEALTH POLICY CONCERNS in the United States are disparities in the oral disease burden and the inability of certain segments of the population to access care. Both of these challenges are largely due to socioeconomic stratification in U.S. society. Nevertheless, as a consequence of the release of the Surgeon General’s report on oral health, there has been a call to action to improve the oral health of underprivileged groups who have difficulty accessing dental services. In particular, an emphasis was placed on children, and, specifically, the oral health of economically disadvantaged children.

Growing and Diverse Older Population

In contrast to the extensive national attention focused on children’s oral health in recent years, America’s growing elderly population has received relatively little attention and almost no public health...
Is it a “Senior Moment” or cognitive change?

- **Normal loss** – small lapses
  - misplace an item,
  - forgetting a name or something at the store.
  - more serious incidents may suggest concern
Is it Dementia? Alzheimer’s? Mild Cognitive Impairment?

A group of symptoms - not a disease

A loss of intellectual functions:
• problems with thinking, remembering, +/or reasoning with sufficient severity to interfere with daily functioning.

Changes in personality, mood and behavior
Dementia is:

- brain disorder
- democratic
- irreversible
- progressive
- usually occurs gradually
- unusual behaviors
- personality changes
Warning Signs

- Memory changes that disrupt daily life.
  - Forgetting recently learned information
  - Asking same question repetitively
  - Needing memory aides
  - Cannot follow a plan or work with numbers
    - Following a recipe, paying bills
  - Loses track of dates, seasons, or time.
- Misplacing things, inability to retrace steps
Behavioral Clues

- Maintains good social skills
- No
- Yes
- Generic answers
- “pleasantly confused”
Behavior management

key principle: KISS

- Keep questions simple
- One question at a time
- One person in charge
- Maintain chatter
- Reduce background noise
- Be flexible
Your approach sets the tone

Take a deep breathe for 10 seconds BEFORE you enter the operatory.

- If you are angry, anxious or tense…they will too
- Use a calm, gentle, matter of fact approach
- Try humor, cajoling, cheerfulness.
- Use touch to help convey your message.
- Begin conversations socially
Rule:
Maintain your sense of humor
You will NEVER win an argument with a demented person.
Alzheimer's Association
Someone to stand by you

800 - 272 - 3900 (national office)

800 - 443 - 2273 (Maryland office)

Help center open 24/7
Keys to success

- Routine preventive services
  - professional and home care

- Ensure “informed consent”

- Educate caregiver
  - professional and home care

- Assess treatment plan(s)

- Schedule patients’ best time of day
Aspiration pneumonia

- Directly connected to poor oral hygiene.
- Poor oral hygiene associated with fevers – esp. in LTC
- Dysphagia is a major concern.
Toothettes

Are NOT Toothbrushes
OPPORTUNITY for dentists:
Fellowship Training Program in Geriatrics

Interdisciplinary program with JHU
Medicine – Dentistry – Psychiatry

Starting date: July 2015
Interested? Call/write/talk to me

jyellowitz@umaryland.edu
410 – 706 - 7254