

# ***Community Health Proposal***

## ***Oral Health Care***

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## **Introduction**

Australia has one of the best primary health care in the world. Still, there are people/groups with special needs which are not fulfilled in health promotion activities. Considering this, a community health needs analysis has been performed. Based on the needs analysis, a health promotion activity has been proposed to improve the care for people with special needs. The community chosen for the purpose is “patients receiving Opioid Treatment in Queanbeyan”.

## **Overview of chosen community**

In simple terms, community can be defined as a social group which shares similar beliefs and culture and reside in same locality under a common Government. The famous sociologist Hillery Jr. defined community as “an organized group which shares common values which affects their social cohesion within a geographic boundary” (as cited in Messing, 2009). Following these definitions, the community in Queanbeyan not only shares a geographic location, they also have similar cultural values and they come under NSW Department of Health. The community has been chosen as they share similar needs of an unmet dental need.

## **Community Profile**

Records from Queanbeyan Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) show that there were over 2000 patients in 2005-06 which gives an estimate of the size of the community (cited in NSW Department of Health, 2006, p. 12). Majority of patients receiving Opioid Treatment in Queanbeyan are adults over 18 years of age who are addicted to alcohol or heroin. They belong to all races and usually have income levels lower than the national average. They undergo treatment at Rural Area Health Services (AHS) and often lack access to timely and appropriate OH care (NSW Department of Health, 2006, p. 13). There is also lack of full-time dentist and

oral care products in these areas. A dental program in Sydney showed that people in this group suffer from higher proportion of decayed teeth, missing teeth and gum disease than the general population (cited in NSW Department of Health, 2006). The unmet dental need can affect the chances of this community in social and employment opportunities. It can dampen their self-esteem which can have a negative impact on their families and children. There is related data which shows a higher percentage of social crime in these communities which can be linked to their unmet dental needs (Light, 2010). This shows that there is a need for urgent health intervention in this community.

### **Data Analysis**

A poster by Chew and McHarg showed that the awareness of Drug and Alcohol Staff in AHS about Oral Health is lower as compared to dentists in urban areas (cited in NSW Department of Health, 2006, p. 14). This staff is usually involved in OPT and it can be presumed that they ignore the importance of oral hygiene and care especially when providing medication. This usually results in poor oral hygiene for the chosen community. The poster also shows that people suffering from alcohol or heroin addiction suffer from higher percentage of decayed teeth, missing teeth and gum disease which is a symptom of poor oral hygiene.

The data available with Queanbeyan OPT program also shows that the chosen community has 43% lower level of income as compared to state average of \$ 28,861 in 2007 (Light, 2010). This can be linked to the unmet dental needs of this community. The poor oral health affects the self-esteem of this population which may have negatively impacted their social and employment opportunities. The data also shows that children of this community show lower academic scores than their state counterparts. Moreover, the social crime among this community

is significantly higher than the state and national average. A reason for this is the lack of social and employment opportunities affect the self-esteem of their families which is reflected in poor academic scores and higher crime rates.

### **Health Issues**

There is a need to prioritize the data available with NSW Department of Health. This will help the State Government to allocate its health budget more judiciously. An important health issue with rural AHS is the lack of a full-time dentist. The Drug and Alcohol staff which administers OPT to the patients is not aware about (interested in?) the importance of oral hygiene of the chosen community. There is a need to appoint a full-time dentist in rural AHS and increase the awareness about OH among the nursing staff available in these Primary Health Care Centres.

Another important health issue is the lack of availability of oral health products such as hi-fluoride pastes, recalcant gum, dry mouth gel, dental floss etc. with the rural AHS. Since the patients are not aware about the importance of oral hygiene, they do not consider buying these products from the market. Availability of these products with the rural AHS itself will encourage the patients to use these products. This will increase their awareness about importance of oral health and also improve their oral hygiene.

### **Health Interventions**

There are two health intervention programs to deal with the health issues identified in the previous section. One is the in-service training program about importance of dental hygiene for the nursing staff in OPT program. This awareness program should be designed by dentists and educators and the program should be of at least 1 hour. If need be, the program may be repeated

in every six months to inform the staff about latest oral care products and techniques to prevent oral decay. The purpose of this programs should be increase the awareness by at least 50% by the end of the program.

Another health intervention which is required is the increased availability of oral care products identified above with the rural AHS. As the nursing staff will be encouraged to provide these products free of cost to the patients, there is an opportunity to improve their oral health. The AHS may ask for sponsorship of these products from Oral Care giants such as Colgate and Listerine. This will be an opportunity for these companies to expand their market. It may prove to be a win-win situation for all the stakeholders concerned. The goal of this program should be to reduce the incidence of decayed teeth, missing teeth and gum disease by 50% during the first year of the program.

### **Justification for Health Interventions**

The health interventions identified above are cost effective and would not be too much strain on the health budget of NSW. Similar training programs in Sydney have reported significant increase in awareness levels of the nursing staff (Glasgow, Wells, Butler, Gear, Lyons, & Rubiano, 2006). So the goal of the program is justified. The duration of the courses is not expected to go beyond 1 hour which makes it time efficient as well. However, the change in attitude is a continuous process. Hence, the programs have to be repeated every six months.

The second intervention program depends on sponsorship from the Oral care products companies such as Colgate and Listerine. There is a need to provide value to the sponsors (such as exclusive rights to certain products in rural AHS). The companies will find it an unexplored

market waiting to be exploited. This is a prevention program which can reduce the health care costs for the Government in the long run and hence is justified.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this report was to conduct a needs analysis of a chosen community and suggest health interventions to improve their condition. The community chosen was the patients undergoing OPT program in Queanbeyan in NSW. The data available with NSW Department of Health suggests that this community faces higher incidence of oral disease which impacts their social and family lives. The health intervention programs suggested were in-service awareness training for nursing staff of OPT and free distribution of Oral care products for the OPT patients. The suggested health intervention programs are preventive in nature. They are cost effective, give better results in the long run and also help in controlling the health care costs of the Government in the long run.

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