Collaboration Between Dental Hygienists And Dietitians In The Care For Community Dwelling Older Adults.

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ABSTRACT

Keywords  interprofessional collaboration older adults malnutrition and oral health

Introduction  Poor nutritional status can impair oral health while poor oral health can influence an individual’s dietary intake, which may result in malnutrition. This interaction between nutritional status and oral health in older age requires attention, coordination and collaboration between healthcare professionals, such as dental hygienists and dietitians.

Objectives  To explore opinions of dental hygienists and dietitians about current collaboration and of success factors and barriers for interprofessional collaboration.

Methodology  Three focus group interviews were held with Dutch dental hygienists and dietitians about nutritional and oral care in community-dwelling older people.

Results  In total 9 dietitians and 11 dental hygienists participated during 3 online focus group interviews. Dental hygienists and dietitians hardly collaborated or consulted with each other. They struggled with the professional boundaries of their field of expertise, experienced a lack of knowledge about the other profession and sometimes give conflicting nutritional or oral health advice to patients. Interprofessional education was scarce during their professional training. Organizational and network obstacles to collaboration were recognized, such as limitations in (consultation) time, reimbursement, and their professional network that often does not include a dietitian or dental hygienist.

Conclusion  Collaboration between dental hygienists and dietitians in the care for community-dwelling older adults is not common. To stimulate interprofessional collaboration, knowledge about the skills and expertise of the other professional should be improved. This is part of a subsequent, currently running, project.