



## Dentistry for Disabled Fellow Beings

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The Disability is a condition attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, neurological, cognitive, or physical impairment that substantially restricts a sufferer's everyday activities. People having disabilities suffer from the same health problems as non-disabled persons and therefore have similar health treatment needs. Information available in the published literature indicates that disabled fellow beings encounter barriers in accessing the professional health services they inevitably require for their required treatment and rehabilitation. Individuals with mental and physical impairment cannot effectively brush and clean their teeth as they are unable to recognize their oral health care needs and therefore are highly predisposed to dental and oral diseases.

A joint report on disability generated by WHO and World Bank reveals that a huge part of world population experiences disability of one kind or the other but dental care facilities for them are either very negligible or absolutely non-existent. It makes access to oral and dental health facilities beyond their means. Poverty, lack of education and social neglect further intensify their day to day tribulations. Many studies have been done in various countries to assess the oral health status of the disabled individuals. Findings of these studies vividly demonstrate that majority of these socially deprived members of the society suffers from awful oro-dental health due to the disability they have. A specific study on dental health and dental care needs of young invalid adult patients in UK shows that the number of untreated carious lesions was higher and the periodontal status was worse than would generally be expected in this age group. A study done on children reveals that the handicapped kids are more prone to caries, malocclusion and periodontal diseases as compared to children without disabilities. But in most of the instances, their preventive and restorative dental treatment needs remain unattended and unsolved. It signifies the need of recognition of special consideration for them in the existing health care delivery systems.

According to the American Dental Association, individuals with any disability often need special consideration when getting dental treatments because of their mental/physical conditions. At present, most of dental clinicians practicing in private clinics or in the institutions don't accept such patients for being not appropriately trained for this highly technical and conscientious task. Results of the research studies performed on this issue confirm the dentists' unwillingness to assume this role. The situation will get worse when in near future, count of disabled persons all over the globe will grow at a faster rate owing to prolong life span, ageing, accidental disabilities and population growth ratio.

Few developed countries like USA, UK and Australia have sensed the gravity of the state of affairs well. Since the last two decades, to cater the treatment needs of this special population; they have started producing man power through training courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level that are being offered through universities and other teaching institutions. But curriculum presently taught in most of the dental schools in majority of the developed and underdeveloped countries don't educate/train their students for managing disabled patients to provide adequate dental treatment. According to findings of one study, the students becoming future dentists under the presently offered curriculum don't even have the preliminary knowledge about oral health care of the disabled person or person with special health care needs. In these countries, this has resulted in a dental profession that feels poorly equipped to offer dental care services to people having one or multiple disabilities. The oral and dental health needs of these special people can be met through the delivery of educational material as a part of a curriculum at undergraduate dental education level. It must not be very difficult as clinical procedures used to treat disabled patients do not differ from those used for routine healthy patients of the population, except that some amendment to these procedures might have to be made. The most important aspect

of student clinical practice involving patients with disabilities is learning to apply previously learned procedures to the demanding clinical situation. Dental graduates, who haven't seen an enough number and variety of patients with special needs during their prescribed years of undergraduate training program, do not feel self-assured to accepting these individuals into their private dental surgeries.

Induction of specially designed curriculum prepared, keeping needs of the patients in view will certainly resolve the predicament and produces extraordinary trained dentists who will show empathy, patience and desire to serve the ailing humanity. It will be much in line with the policy of International Dental Federation (FDI). Adopted in September 2016 this FDI policy strongly emphasizes encouragement on training in special care dentistry at the undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education levels through all dentistry disciplines.

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