

Oral Health for People With Special Needs

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The number of people with special needs is increasing dramatically. In this context, people with special needs refers to people who have difficulty obtaining good oral health or accessing oral health services because of a disability or medical condition. Among these groups, the numbers of people with developmental disabilities and the emerging population of aging baby boomers with teeth are demonstrating dramatic growth. People in these groups have significantly more dental disease than the general population. It is already difficult for many people with special needs to obtain oral health services. Under the current system of care, this situation will only get worse.

The major health disparities experienced by people with special needs in California are attracting the attention of policy makers as the problem increases and advocates for these populations become more vocal about their concerns. The dental profession must carefully consider the implications of these growing populations and the implications for the future training of oral health professionals, and the delivery of dental services.

This issue of the *Journal* and the next are devoted to presenting the conclusions of a conference developed by the Pacific Center for Special Care at the University of the Pacific Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry and host-

ed by the California Dental Association Foundation in November 2003. Some of the background papers are included in this issue and the rest in the next issue of this *Journal*. Some of the solutions proposed in these issues of the *Journal* may be controversial and may test boundaries and hypotheses. However, a conscious effort was made at the conference not to be constricted by the structure of the current dental delivery system and to “think outside the box” in developing potential solutions to a very serious problem emerging in our society and our state.

We hope the consensus statement and the background papers in these issues will stimulate thinking among many people about the dramatic problems that are emerging with providing oral health services for people with special needs. It will take an increased awareness of these problems and the engagement of many individuals and groups to create a world where people with special needs can have a lifetime of oral health. **CDA**



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