Introduction

Bathurst is located within the Central Tablelands of NSW, approx. 200km west of Sydney. The main Bathurst community has benefited from water fluoridation since the 1970’s, however smaller towns who have recently received water fluoridated have a high prevalence of dental decay, strongly indicating the need for Oral Health Promotion and Prevention. Dental Caries is a preventable, multifactorial, microbial, chronic disease affecting individuals in their physical, social and cultural environments.

According to the 2013 Oral Health 2020 Strategic Framework, 40% of children aged 3 – 7 years have either experienced or have untreated dental disease. However, this percentage is significantly higher in certain communities, such as Bathurst. Increased caries rates experienced or have untreated dental disease. Due to the geographical isolation, shortage in health care services and providers, and socioeconomic disparities experienced by those in rural areas, there is a significant need for regular oral health education and promotion, especially for children within the 3 – 7 year demographic.

Aim

The ‘Little Smiles’ program aims to educate the children of Bathurst, as well as the teachers, parents and health care professionals about the importance of good oral health through effective oral hygiene and dietary choices.

Methods & Materials

Oral Health Promotion was carried out through presenting the ‘Little Smiles’ program to chosen preschools, primary schools and Child and Family Healthcare Nurses within Bathurst and Oberon, and providing them with toothbrushes and toothpaste from Colgate along with pamphlets from COHS NSW. Teachers and Healthcare Workers were provided with resource packs, which they could use to further educate the staff, parents and children on oral health and hygiene.

Pre and post confidence questionnaires were conducted before and after the presentation by teachers and some Child and Family Healthcare Nurses, as well as teachers at Pre-Schools and Primary Schools. A comparative analysis of the results shows an overall positive shift in scores.

Results

Pre- and Post-Confidence Questionnaires were conducted to evaluate the overall causal effect of the ‘Little Smiles’ program. Questionnaires were issued to Early Childhood Nurses, as well as teachers at Pre-Schools and Primary Schools. A comparative analysis of the results shows an overall positive shift in scores.

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References

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Discussion

In conclusion, the results from the project provided evidence that although the project implementation was successful, there is an increased need for continuous Oral Health Promotion to be provided to rural communities, such as Bathurst. Increased caries prevention strategies should also be implemented as some children living in these rural towns have limited access to regular fluoride treatment and fluoridated water.

Conclusion

The impact evaluation of the program showed a positive correlation between the presentation and an increase in the confidence and knowledge in relation to oral health and oral hygiene regimes of the staff, teachers and children. Although some Healthcare staff reported in the Pre-Confidence questionnaire that they were confident in regards to the importance of oral health and the effects of effective oral hygiene and dietary choices, their Post-Confidence results remained the same, as they had overestimated their dental knowledge.

Upon reaching Bathurst, we discovered that the hospital had workshops in place for new parents, including children’s oral health, which were run each month, so the presentation for the parents was excluded.