Introduction

A comprehensive Oral Health Promotion Program targeting patients undergoing head and neck radiation was developed & delivered by BOH students N. Batros and T Knudsen in 2013. The program has continued to be delivered by allied health staff involved with the treatment of head & neck radiation in the Hastings-MacLeay Community Health Clinic and North Coast Cancer Clinic.

Aim

The aim of this project was to conduct an impact evaluation of the current oral health program and to develop a referral pathway between the public dental hospital and the radiotherapy cancer clinic. Identifying which objectives of the original program were not being met was paramount.

The impact evaluation will determine which parts of the current program need to be reviewed as well as some suggestions to make improvements.

Methods & Materials

A series of interviews and questionnaires were provided to the staff of the dental and cancer clinic before we arrived to gather some general information about the current referral pathway between Hastings-MacLeay Community Health Clinic and North Coast Cancer Clinic. Pre and post questionnaires were completed at both clinics, providing views from both clinics about the current referral pathway.

Once the questionnaires and interviews were complete, we were able to analyse the data and determine how to improve the current program.

Results

The main concern of both clinics was; patients not returning for treatment at the dental clinic after XRT was complete. This was due to a number of factors which we had to address, including patients not being contacted for appointments, no recall system in place, and patients not being aware that continuing dental treatment was required. To combat these issues a two letters were created as a way of formal communication between the clinics, allowing for better patient management.

Impact Evaluation on Current Project

Process Evaluation on Updated Referral Pathway

Discussion

Incorporating two letters into the existing program, enabled a formal method of communication, improving patient management and referrals between the two clinics. Initially it was found that the communication between clinics was non-existent, for example; if further dental treatment was needed the cancer clinic was not aware, and the same vice versa; when the XRT was complete, the dental clinic was not aware and patients were not being called back to complete treatment.

It was interesting to find during an interview with the a Senior Oncologist at NCCI, it was mainly due to the patients lack of motivation and importance placed on their oral health, especially when they have more severe health issues, such as head and neck cancer, that they did not attend their dental appointments.

Conclusion

Through interviews, questionnaires and discussions with the health professionals from both clinics, it was found that the program has been a success and has been of benefit to head and neck radiotherapy patients. An outcome evaluation must be completed to determine the long-term benefit to the community of Port Macquarie. The implementation of formal correspondence between clinics via letters was positively received and believed to make the referral pathways smoother for staff.

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References

Oral Health Promotion for Health Professionals and Patients Receiving Head and Neck Cancer Radiotherapy (2013) N. Batros & T Knudsen