

Who Does What or How to Meet the Demands for Treatment?

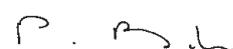
The topic of this editorial is the optimization of oral healthcare delivery by distribution of tasks.

It is interesting to compare the characteristics of the various systems for the provision of oral healthcare in Europe as they differ in the financing, organization and services. In some models, the concept of a dental team with various categories of oral health personnel is well developed but not in other models. It is clear that all these elements influence the professional environment and the delivery of oral healthcare.

Imagine a scale comprising perfect health – say pristine gingival – at one extremity and disability – severe periodontitis – at the other. Between these two points there is a wide spectrum of clinical situations, each requiring a different level of intervention. In regards to services, there should be an adequation between the level of intervention and the resources used. For example, low-technology resources can be used in simple clinical situations whereas high-technology care is required in complex cases. This may well be applied to periodontal therapy. Indeed, different types of competence and skill may be required, depending on the phase of treatment and the therapeutic goals.

In the management of the periodontal patient, the objectives of treatment have to be determined on the basis of the patient's needs and of the patient's personal characteristics. The optimal solution is the treatment that is the most efficient and the simplest without compromising on the quality of the service. In this context, distribution of tasks among the dental team could be of benefit. Prevention, self-care, low-technology services – including prophylaxis, fluoride application, removal of calculus and subgingival scaling – could be carried out by oral health care personnel. Where high-technology procedures and an understanding of the underlying scientific and medical principles are concerned, highly trained dentists with further specialist training are essential.

The optimum utilization of resources within the oral health team is essential if it is to achieve the most economic, yet adequate, oral health care for the patient. Certain conditions, however, have to be met. Defining the competences and the responsibilities for each category of oral health care personnel is of the utmost importance. In addition, collaborating with appropriately trained personnel is essential.



Pierre Baehni
Genève