

Dental Problems of Children with Disabilities

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The term disability includes all handicapping conditions or combinations a health professional might encounter. Children with disabilities may have a mental, physical, medical, or social condition that interferes with normal functioning [1].

Guidelines for the specific needs of people with difficulties in physical and mental development -issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health [2], includes definitions of persons with disabilities aged to 26 years (Article 4):

- Blind or visually impaired.
- Deaf or hearing impaired.
- Individuals with difficulties in speech and voice.
- Physically disabled people.
- Mentally retarded people (easy, moderate, severe and profound).
- Autistic persons.
- Chronically ill persons.
- People with multiple disabilities.

Regardless of their level of development and the social order, the countries in the world are more engaged and more organized and started the mobilization for solving the problems of children and adults with special educational needs and meet their specific needs. It is certain that the education of children and youth with special educational needs in our country does not rely on a long tradition [3].

Although the Republic of Macedonia has undertaken extensive educational reforms, improving the situation of children with special educational needs are faced with various obstacles: stagnant economy with high unemployment, limited public awareness of integrative approaches to education and health facilities and still insignificant resources for the educational reform.

On the 24 December i2001 the Government adopted the National Strategy for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia (Official Gazette No.101 / 01) [4].

Although the access to physical disability in our country changes over time, however dental care for these patients is usually limited to emergency treatment, tooth extraction, which still happens in many communities, particularly in the less developed and poorer areas. The restoration of teeth and soft tissues of the oral cavity, the prevention of oral diseases, treatment of caries teeth and periodontal disease, including orthodontic treatment, often is not part of dental care for this group of patients for various reasons:

- Poorly informed patients and parents about the needs and possibilities of dental care (they do not receive information from the doctors who conducted the primary therapy, lack of educational brochures, etc).
- Lack of motivation of patients and their parents or guardians (as the severity of the primary disease is greater, the interest of the parents and guardians for oral health is lower)
- Lack of incentives for dentists to work with people with special needs (difficult

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access and communication, more time is needed for intervention).

- Insufficient number of trained dental staff - training, education, specialization
- poor organization of dental services in stationary institutions.
- Lack of records of these patients - a central register.
- Lack of interdisciplinary collaboration (commissions, expert contacts, consultants, institutions).
- Lack of adequate offices for this group of patients - with specialized experts, adequately equipped, available at anytime.
- Lack of financial resources.

Dental problems of patients with special needs are often associated with mental abilities of the child and his awareness of his own incompetence. These include: considerably poor oral hygiene, significant presence of soft and hard deposits on teeth, presence of periodontal disease, high percentage of untreated carious teeth with all the attendant complications associated with them, a small number of filled teeth, large number of extracted teeth compared to the healthy population, trauma and damage the teeth and mouth are much more prevalent (due to falls), and considerably more common prevalence of malocclusions of different degrees of difficulty [5].

All around the world, the subject Dental care for children with special needs have to be included in all undergraduate programs of Faculties for dentistry, which is important for proper education of dentists [6].

The oldest state faculty of dentistry in Macedonia, this year for the first time introduced elective subject Children with Special Needs in the program for senior dental nurses. I hope it will make a significant contribution to developing further awareness of this group of citizens in order to improve their access to dental care.

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