Oral Health as Part of the Pregnancy Conversation

May 6, 2011

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Children’s Dental Health Project
CDHP was created in 1997 as the voice for children’s oral health.

Vision: At CDHP, we look forward to the achievement of oral health for all children to ensure that they reach their full potential.

Mission: Creating and advancing innovative solutions to achieve oral health for all children.
Our Approach

1. Reduce disease burden
2. Improved access to quality care

Our Goals

- To Prevent childhood tooth decay, because cavities are the result of a disease that is overwhelmingly preventable.
- To Promote solutions that are grounded in the best available research and supporting exploration when evidence is lacking.
- To Engage policymakers and other decision-makers in addressing ongoing inequities in oral health and to implement cost-effective solutions.
Perinatal Oral Health
Why is Perinatal Oral Health Important?

• Oral health is key to overall health and wellbeing
• Pregnancy increases women’s risk for oral infections
• Research exhibits associations between periodontal disease and birth outcomes
• Perinatal oral health contributes to establishing good oral health for children
• The safety of dental care during pregnancy is confirmed

Barriers

• Lack of awareness of relationship between oral and overall health

• Concern regarding safety of dental x-rays, materials, and medications

• Fear

• Low priority given to oral health

• Provider reluctance to provide care during pregnancy

• Lack of insurance coverage

Improving Perinatal Oral Health Project
Focus Groups
Improving Perinatal and Infant Oral Health Project

- Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau grant

- Collaboration between the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and Children’s Dental Health Project

- Goals: to promote awareness of and access to perinatal and infant oral health on national, state, and local levels

- 6 year project, ended January 2011
Advancements in Perinatal Oral Health

- Increased awareness of the link between oral and systemic health, and the role of pregnancy

- Evidence documents an association between periodontal disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth and low birth weight in infants

- Research confirms the safety of oral health care during the perinatal period

Activities

• **Public education on the infectious and transmissible nature of dental caries.** Partners include Today’s Child Magazine, National Healthy Start Association, and Parents Magazine

• **Series of focus groups with low-income pregnant women and new mothers**

• **Patterning with “Mommy Blogs” to disseminate perinatal oral health messages based on research via trusted messengers**

• **Work with Maryland Oral Health Literacy Campaign**

• **Pushing for National Oral Health Public Education Campaign**
Focus Groups

When: 2009
Where: Urban and rural locations in Maryland
Who: With low-income pregnant women and mothers with children age 0-2
(22 African American, 12 Caucasian)
What: 90 minute discussion sessions w/ professional moderator

Focus Groups

Topics:

• What women know and do to promote health during pregnancy
• Past and current use of dental care system
• Current oral health practices for their children
• Personal oral health practices
• What women know about preventing tooth decay
• Reactions to brochures and messages about oral health, including suggestions for promoting oral health for mothers and their infants.
Focus Groups - Results

**Oral Health Knowledge:**
- Most had exposure to basic oral health knowledge
  - Bottles/sippy cups, sugar, mouth cleaning
- Myths and misperceptions
  - Tap water, care during pregnancy, unaware of fluoride benefits, sugar levels in foods/drinks
- Advice from professionals varied and was not given early enough
  - Age for dental visits, baby bottle mouth
Focus Groups - Results

**Dental Care Experiences:**

- Most had generally negative feelings about dental care
  - Pain and fear in earlier experiences – fear about infant
  - Positive things said about corporate urban clinics
- Cost is a major deterrent
  - Most had not been to dentist since childhood
- Misconceptions about care
  - Few knew of importance and/or safety of care during pregnancy
Focus Groups - Results

Women’s Current Oral Health Practices:

• Tooth brushing most common practice
• Flossing only mentioned after prodding by moderator
• Other practices mentioned infrequently
Response to Brochures and Messages

• Many women asked questions about brochures
• Concepts not explained well enough – jargon/technical terms
• Women had gotten conflicting information on/did not fully understand some concepts
  – Transmission not well understood: “my daughter’s pediatrician said it was ok (for me) to chew up her food because of building her immune system...”
Focus Groups – Lessons Learned

• Women are simply unaware of importance of oral health during pregnancy
• Women need information earlier about their oral health and their children
  – They are willing to implement but need the tools
• Consistent messages from trusted providers are key
• Plain language in messaging is often overlooked
• Prescriptive messages need to be backed up by addressing fears and misconceptions
Moving Forward

• **Educate Providers**
  – Dental care during pregnancy is safe and benefits mother and child
  – Provide information early and often

• **Work with health plans**
  – Improve access, implement guidelines, promote care, develop educational materials

• **Advocate State dental coverage for pregnant women**
  – Medicaid, Health Care Reform

• **Continue to educate public, especially low-income**
  – Importance of care, oral health behaviors, transmission
  – Simple messages
  – Address Fears

• **Coordinate with other providers**
  – Pediatricians, OBGYN’s – referrals & patient education
  – Promote age one dental visit
Contact Information

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