

## Expression of Interest – An Integrated Literature Review

**Title:** Role and influence of nurses for oral health improvement and prevention in the elderly in the United Kingdom

### **Background:**

The number of elderly people living in the United Kingdom (UK) currently is around 11 million and this number is forecasted to increase to 14 million by 2032 (Public Health England 2015). Over time, the healthcare system has come to associate older health with chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and chronic kidney disease, and several policies have aimed to educate people on the prevention and management of these conditions. However, the World Health Organization (2002) has recently proposed an 'active ageing' framework which includes oral health as an important component of the ageing process. Impaired oral health affects social life and communication abilities, and imposes dietary restrictions on the aged. Current structural barriers embedded in the dental care system are one of the most important reasons for suboptimal oral health in the elderly in the UK (Public Health England 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the spotlight on oral health issues in the elderly in the UK is significantly lesser as compared to other chronic conditions. According to the Global Burden of Disease 2010 Study, oral health issues led to a loss of 15 million disability-adjusted life years in the UK, which can be translated into 224 years for a population of every 100,000 (Marcenes et al. 2013). Some of the oral health problems that predominantly occur in the ageing population are tooth loss, periodontal disease, dry mouth, and edentulism, which affect both the health status and quality of life of these people. Oral health in the elderly has only recently started gaining momentum; however, there are very few population-based studies of the UK population that accurately quantify the extent of oral health problems in the elderly. Most studies that have been published are not specific to the elderly population and are based on self-rated oral health indications. Consequentially, there is very little information available for both the elderly people as well as healthcare practitioners regarding the status of oral health in this population in the UK (Ramsay et al. 2015).

According to the Essence of Care 2010: Benchmarks for Personal Hygiene, oral health has been regarded as an important aspect in nursing practice (Department of Health 2010). As nurses are the primary caregivers for the elderly population, they are constantly aware of their patients' physical and health-related challenges. Hence, it becomes their duty to assess the oral health of their patients and provide suitable advice and guidance regarding the management of oral health conditions, providing specialist referrals if required. Some patients who are experiencing cognitive changes may require assistance in maintaining their oral health, and it is the responsibility of the nurse to provide any aid required. Thus, nurses play a very important role in the promotion of oral health, and the prevention and management of oral health conditions in the elderly population (Department of Health 2011).

Despite several policy frameworks that have provided detailed guides for nurses to provide adequate oral care to elderly patients, there is very little literature available regarding the influence that nurses have had in the improvement in oral health in the elderly population in the UK. A study by Preston et al. (2000) found that nurses who worked in acute care facilities regularly gave dental advice to their patients; however, their core knowledge of orodental care was marked with several discrepancies and their knowledge regarding the dental treatments offered by the National Health Service was lacking. Another study conducted by Clay (2000) found that nurses' perceptions about oral care and their own personal anxiety about visiting a dentist acted as barriers in providing oral care advice to their patients. Therefore, regardless of the resources available for nurses, their contribution in providing oral care guidance to their patients is minimal and evidence regarding their role in this area is lacking.

### **Aims and Objectives:**

This integrated literature review aims to answer the question: 'What are the factors that influence the role played by nurses both in the prevention of poor oral health and in the improvement of oral health while providing care for hospitalized elderly patients in the United Kingdom?'

The aim of the literature review is to improve oral healthcare in the elderly population of the UK through an evaluation of the available literature regarding the role played by nurses in the prevention of poor oral health and improvement of oral health in hospitalized elderly people in the UK.

The objectives of the proposed literature review are:

- To assess the quality and extent of the available literature regarding the specific ways in which nurses influence oral healthcare in the elderly in the UK
- To establish what research tells us about nurses and their role in preventing poor oral health in hospitalized elderly patients in the UK
- To establish what research tells us about nurses and their role in improving oral health in hospitalized elderly patients in the UK
- To consider implications for practice and future research regarding oral healthcare in the elderly population in the UK

### **Review Methods:**

With reference to the aims and objectives of the proposed integrated literature review, the databases PubMed, ScienceDirect, and CINAHL will be searched for relevant articles pertaining to the role of nurses in the provision of oral healthcare to the elderly in the UK. Policy papers and other significant reports from government websites will also be included in the review if they have reported surveys regarding the implementation of specific dental practices by nurses for the elderly population. The keyword string that will be used for the search (with possible minor alterations based on the search

results) is: (Nurses) AND (Oral Health OR Dental OR Orodental) AND (Elderly OR Aged OR Older) AND (United Kingdom) AND (Hospital).

Only original research articles will be included in this review if they meet the criteria of the objectives regarding role of nurses in providing oral healthcare to the elderly in the UK. Articles that have surveyed people over the age of 60 will be included in the review regardless of their age, ethnicity, and geographical location. Articles that directly analyze and assess the role of nurse practitioners in oral healthcare in a hospital setting will be included. Systematic reviews, meta-analyses, opinion pieces, and editorials will be excluded from the review. Articles that do not specifically survey the aged population and report findings on an age-independent population will be excluded. Articles that do not directly and specifically consider the nurse's role in providing oral healthcare services will be excluded from the review. Articles that investigate the role of nurses for oral healthcare of the elderly in a residential or community care setting will be excluded. Articles for the review will be selected based on these inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the references of the selected articles will be checked to find other suitable articles for the review. The quality of the selected articles will be assessed using the critical appraisal tool, Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP).

Once the articles for the review are selected, a data extraction table will be created on a spreadsheet that will include all objective information about the selected studies. The data that will be noted down in the first review will include age of the population; other specifics such as gender, ethnicity, or geographical location that have been targeted in the study; aim(s) of the study; methods used; sample size and characteristics; results obtained; and limitations of the study (if any). Based on the initial data extraction table, the studies will be thematically categorized based on the findings. Some might be positive and some might be negative; thus, categorizing the studies based on the final results will help in evaluating the strength of the findings in the available literature.

Depending on the results, up to five themes will be created and the studies will be categorized based on the theme to which they match. Under each theme, all findings from the studies will be explicitly mentioned and analyzed in view of the existing literature on the topic. Special training programs, policies, or interventions that have brought about alterations in nurses' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes will be critically evaluated in the review. The review will be concluded reporting whether the literature was, overall, positive or negative regarding the role of nurses in the provision of oral healthcare to the elderly in the UK. Finally, based on the results of the literature review, future implications for practice will be provided to enable nurses to play a greater role in providing oral healthcare services to their aged patients in the UK.

## References

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