

Innovations in Rural Oral Health: Migrant Oral Health Case Summary

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Case Overview: There are myriad challenges related to providing oral healthcare for migrants and refugees. Barriers to achieving the best possible clinical outcomes for these populations are often rooted in the lack of personalized care and communication that addresses cultural barriers and approaches to health care. For example, many migrants only seek dental care when they have a toothache and do not prioritize preventive measures like regular check-ups or oral hygiene practices. Cultural and religious factors, such as the preference for female dentists or limited trust due to language barriers, also play a role. These factors, although seemingly insignificant individually, collectively create significant barriers to accessing dental care.

Ask of the Group: What are the best ways to equip providers with a better understanding of the social determinants of migrants' health and oral health?

Current Plan of Action: Dr. Tabrizi's preliminary recommendations are to:

- Work with a team including social workers, public health professionals, and providers to develop person-centered and culturally competent treatment plans.
- Ensure that all learners in health disciplines understand that recognizing the person as a whole is just as important as diagnosing the condition in that person.
- Engage social workers and public health advocates who understand the specific cultures and languages of the migrants in order to improve trust.
- Advocate for policies and guidelines to support oral health integration into healthcare systems and collaboration among healthcare disciplines to prioritize oral health in the care of migrants and refugees.

Recommendations

- Build trust and understanding with members of this population by initiating conversations that explore their cultural backgrounds and experiences.



Recommendations, continued

- ▶ Seek input and perspectives from the migrant workers themselves through surveys, other data collection, and conversations. Their voices are vital in understanding their day-to-day challenges and ensuring that policies and decisions are aligned with their needs.
- ▶ Involve individuals who have experienced migration and are currently working as healthcare providers or in decision-making roles. They can bridge the gap between the experiences of migrant workers and policymaking, ensuring that the unique perspectives and challenges of this population are considered.
- ▶ Increase awareness and education about the oral health challenges of this population among health professionals in general. This can be achieved through pre-doctoral education, rotations in migrant farm worker facilities, and increased exposure to diverse populations across all health professions.
- ▶ Utilize various methods to raise awareness, such as webinars, ECHO sessions, or presentations by individuals who have experience working with migrant and rural communities. It is important to hear directly from people within these communities; if they cannot present themselves, use storytelling to convey their experiences and needs.
- ▶ Establish community support centers or programs like the Family Support Center in Las Vegas, which provides education, language support, and guidance for both children and parents in refugee families.
- ▶ Enhance language accessibility by having resources, posters, and information available in multiple languages. This helps create a welcoming environment, and fosters trust among migrant populations and providers.
- ▶ Integrate education on social determinants of health into the curricula of healthcare programs. This includes public health courses, cultural competency communication courses, and clinical care. Incorporating poverty simulations, case-based assessments, and community service can also help students understand and address the unique challenges faced by migrant and rural communities.
- ▶ Bridge the gap between providers and insurance systems to ensure that providers are aware of the reimbursement options available for care delivered to migrant populations. This includes educating providers about payment processes and assuring them that they will be compensated for the care they provide.



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