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Diabetic patients; their knowledge, practices and attitudes regarding oral health

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Objectives: To assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding oral health among patients attending the diabetic clinic at Colombo South Teaching Hospital

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study among 427 patients attending the diabetic clinic was carried out using an interviewer administered pretested questionnaire.

Results: Of the 427 patients, majority (74%) were females above 50 years of age. Of the patients 56% recognized an association between diabetes and oral health. Only 15% knew that they were more prone to oral fungal infections due to diabetes though 89% knew that diabetes resulted in delayed wound healing. Oral cancer (72%) was mainly recognized as a complication of poor oral hygiene but majority were unaware of the risk of endocarditis. Regarding attitudes, 98% believed that diabetics should be vigilant regarding their oral hygiene. While 29% believed that a dentist should be visited at least twice a year, only one patient practiced this. A majority (93%) was of the attitude that brushing teeth twice a day is important to maintain good oral hygiene and 92 % claimed to practice this. Overall study population had moderate knowledge (64%) good attitudes (77%) and moderate practices (73%) with regard to their oral health. All patients were willing to receive advice and information regarding oral hygiene or be directed to relevant dental clinics during their diabetic clinic visit.

Conclusions: Educating diabetics regarding oral health is a timely need as diabetes is a major health burden in Sri Lanka.