

Special care dentistry in Chilean public health services: Training is the key.

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In Chile, there are 20% of people with some sort of disability (PwD). The majority of whom come from a low socioeconomic background. Therefore, 80% of these people receive medical attention in the public system.¹ In 2010, the Chilean National Disability Law entered into force to promote equal opportunities for PwD. However, concrete public policies that address the specific health needs of PwD have not yet been implemented in public or private health facilities.²

Most of PwD present several comorbidities, displacing their oral health to a lower priority level. This is further complicated by the lack of time and training of primary dental care providers. Therefore the consequence is that PwD have both poor oral health and poor oral health-related quality of life.³

Many PwD fail to be treated in primary care facilities, and are referred to major hospitals in order to be treated under general anesthesia. My experience has taught me that waiting times for dental care under general anesthesia are over one year. However, most of PwD referred to pediatric dentistry are able to be treated using non-pharmacological therapies such as behavioral management.

To improve the dental care of PwD, public health policies should be implemented focusing on: the creation of dental programs which concentrate on patient care and not on the number of actions to be taken; an increase in the number of hours of dental care for allocated for treatments under general anesthesia; and the training and sensitizing of primary care dental staff through Special Care Dentistry training programs such as the ones provided by Universidad de Chile and Universidad de Concepción.

All patients have the same rights and deserve the same opportunities for accessing dental care. It is up to us to allocate more time and show more commitment to attend to their health needs and improve their quality of life.

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