



American Dental Hygienists' Association

Dental Hygiene Diagnosis
Position Paper

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The dental hygiene diagnosis provides the foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the dental hygiene treatment plan. In order to provide comprehensive quality oral health care, it is the professional obligation of dental hygienists to formulate a dental hygiene diagnosis.

Purpose

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) recognizes that the dental hygiene process of care includes assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation.¹ Further, ADHA supports educational curricula that lead to competency in the dental hygiene process of care.² Therefore, the position of ADHA is that dental hygienists, by virtue of graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program, are educationally prepared to conduct a dental hygiene diagnosis and that the formulation of a dental hygiene diagnosis is the responsibility of the dental hygienist in the delivery of quality oral health care.

Definitions

Diagnosis has been defined as “an analysis of the cause and nature of a problem or situation, or a statement of its solution.” Diagnosis is considered a generic term describing a process used by many professions and should not be considered the domain of any one health profession.

A variety of diagnostic models have been proposed by medicine, dentistry and nursing. Medical and dental diagnostic models tend to

focus on the diagnosis of systemic diseases and dental pathology, respectively. Nursing models differ from medical and dental diagnostic models in that the nursing model expands the focus of diagnosis from a disease orientation to an emphasis on the overall health function of individuals and groups.

Dental hygiene diagnostic models tend to follow nursing diagnostic models by further focusing on the overall health of the patient/client. Widely recognized dental hygiene experts and textbook authors have formally developed theory, models, and definitions for the dental hygiene diagnosis. Darby and Walsh defined the dental hygiene diagnosis using a human need theory as “the identification of a client’s human need deficit related to dental hygiene care. A professional dental hygiene diagnosis is a clinical diagnosis made by a dental hygienist that identifies an actual or potential human need deficit related to oral health or disease that the dental hygienist is educated and licensed to treat.”³

Mueller-Joseph and Peterson propose a two-step dental hygiene diagnosis model based on an earlier nursing model that includes data processing and diagnosis formulation.⁴ The Mueller-Joseph and Peterson model uses a dental hygiene diagnostic statement that forms the foundation from which the plan of care is designed, implemented and evaluated.

Wilkins defines the dental hygiene diagnosis as “the identification of an existing or potential oral health problem that a dental hygienist is qualified and licensed to treat.”⁵

Supporting Evidence

The Accreditation Standards for Dental Hygiene Education Programs as approved by the

American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation (ADA CDA) also recognize the dental hygiene process of care which includes the dental hygiene diagnosis in Standard 2-19.⁶

Standard 2-19 Excerpt:

Standard 2-19 Graduates must be competent in providing the dental hygiene process of care, which includes:

Planning—the establishment of realistic goals and treatment strategies to facilitate optimal oral health

- a. dental hygiene diagnosis
- b. dental hygiene treatment plan
- c. informed consent
- d. dental hygiene case presentation.

The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) Competencies for Entry into the Profession of Dental Hygiene describe the abilities expected of a dental hygienist entering the profession.⁷ The ADEA competencies include the dental hygiene diagnosis within the patient/client care competencies, which defines dental hygiene diagnosis as “the use of critical decision making skills to reach conclusions about the patient’s/client’s dental hygiene needs based on all available assessment data.”

Conclusion

The formulation of the dental hygiene diagnosis is a vital component of the dental hygiene process of care. Dental hygienists practicing collaboratively with patients/clients and other professional members of interdisciplinary health care teams are prepared to analyze and synthesize patient assessment data as part of the

diagnostic process. The dental hygiene diagnosis provides the foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the dental hygiene treatment plan. In order to provide comprehensive quality oral health care, it is the professional obligation of dental hygienists to formulate a dental hygiene diagnosis.

References

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American Dental Hygienists' Association

444 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 3400

Chicago, IL 60611

(312) 440-8900

(312) 467-1806 (fax)

www.adha.org

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