

Gerodontology: Why is it Important?

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Abstract

Gerodontology or Geriatric Dentistry is a specialized area of dentistry which deals with the diagnosis, management, and treatment of dental conditions relating to the elderly.

Geriatric patients often suffer from complex medical issues related to ageing which mostly occur in combination with one another, compromising both the physical and mental health of the individual.

Oral health is often ignored in the elderly and oral diseases allied with ageing are multifaceted, adversely affecting quality of life. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach is essential for such patients. Certain strategies need to be adopted for oral health improvement including management and maintenance of oral conditions which can be either systematically or pharmacologically induced. The primary aim of such treatment is to ensure the re-establishment of proper masticatory function.

Keywords: Geriatric Patient; Gerodontology; Multidisciplinary Approach

Introduction

“Gerodontology” is the study of the physical and psychological changes which is incident to old age is called gerontology and care of aged is called clinical gerontology or geriatrics [1]. A study done by Griffin et al, concluded that there is a strong correlation between general and oral health in elderly population [2].

Henceforth, is the delivery of dental care to older adults involving the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of problems associated with normal aging and age-related diseases as part of an interdisciplinary team with other health care professionals [3].

Proper diagnosis and treatment planning are of utmost importance for geriatric patients, where the primary aim of the dentist must be restoration of dentition along with maintenance of biologic, aesthetic and functional parameters [4].

According to Govt. of India, elderly people are defined in developing countries as those who are 60 years of age or above whereas in the developed world, they are above 65 years of age [5].

Dental diseases commonly seen in such patients include root caries, attrition, periodontal disease, missing teeth because of earlier neglect, edentulous, poor quality of alveolar ridges, ill-fitting dentures, mucosal lesions, oral ulceration, dry mouth (xerostomia), oral cancers and rampant caries [6].

Many of these are due to neglecting oral health at early stages of life which may include:

- Consumption of cariogenic food.
- Habits like smoking, tobacco/pan/betel nut chewing.
- Lack of awareness.

- Improper tooth brushing techniques.
- Irregular dental checkups.

All these problems may multiply in magnitude due to declining immunity and coexistence of systemic medical problems also few conditions may be drug induced caused by use of medications like anti-hypertensives, anti-psychotics, anxiolytics etc. which may lead to xerostomia, and in the absence of the protective influences of saliva within the mouth there is an increase in oral diseases. Financial constraints may be another reason affecting oral health. Also, lack of family support or of transportation facilities affect access to dental services in later life [3].

Goals of Geriatric dentistry are

- Maintaining oral health of individuals.
- Ensuring that proper preventive measures are taken for proper functioning of masticatory system
- Maintaining general and oral health of diseased patient.

Objectives of Geriatric dentistry are

- To recognize and relieve difficulties of geriatric patients [7].
- Preservation and/or restoration of proper functioning in geriatric patients [8].

Oral disease can cause pain, difficulty in speaking, mastication, swallowing, maintaining a balanced diet, not to mention aesthetic considerations and facial alterations leading to anxiety and depression.

Conclusion

Gerodontology is significant as oral health is equally important as systemic health. It involves a multidisciplinary approach in which the periodontist, prosthodontist and restorative dentist work in harmony with each other to maintain integrity of the oral cavity. Functional occlusion along with aesthetics is one of the key goal of dental rehabilitation in elderly. The soft and hard tissues of the oral cavity are a part of one stomatognathic system and are interdependent on one another.

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