

Does access to general dental treatment affect the number and complexity of patients presenting to the acute hospital service with severe dentofacial infections?

Abstract

Aim: This is a retrospective study to review the treatment and management of patients presenting with odontogenic infections in a large urban teaching hospital over a four-year period, comparing the number and complexity of odontogenic infections presenting to an acute general hospital in two periods, as follows: Group A (January 2008 to March 2010) versus Group B (April 2010 to December 2011). The background to the study is 'An alteration in patient access to primary dental care instituted by the Department of Health in April 2010'.

Objectives: a) to identify any alteration in the pattern and complexity of patients' presentation with odontogenic infections following recent changes in access to treatment via the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) and the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme (DTBS) in April 2010; and, b) to evaluate the management of severe odontogenic infections.

Method: Data was collated by a combination of a comprehensive chart review and electronic patient record analysis based on the primary discharge diagnosis as recorded in the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) system.

Results: Fifty patients were admitted to the National Maxillofacial Unit, St James's Hospital, under the oral and maxillofacial service over a four-year period, with an odontogenic infection as the primary diagnosis. There was an increased number of patients presenting with odontogenic infections during Group B of the study. These patients showed an increased complexity and severity of infection. Although there was an upward trend in the numbers and complexity of infections, this trending did not reach statistical significance.

Conclusions: The primary cause of infection was dental caries in all patients. Dental caries is a preventable and treatable disease. Increased resources should be made available to support access to dental care, and thereby lessen the potential for the morbidity and mortality associated with serious odontogenic infections. The study at present continues as a prospective study.



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