

Practices and Attitudes of General Dentists Regarding Infants Oral Health

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Objectives: General dentists constitute approximately 80% of the dentist workforce; and therefore should be utilized to the maximum extent to provide dental care to children. This study aimed to determine the practices and attitudes of general dentist in Nebraska regarding oral care for infants and the age one dental visit.

Methods: This research was IRB-exempt. A survey was mailed to Nebraska general dentists seeking information on their practices and attitudes about infant oral health care, years in practice, training, ages of children seen, procedures performed and opinions regarding the age one dental visit. Responses were tabulated and frequency distributions (in %) for responses to each item were computed. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. All tests utilized a 0.05 level of statistical significance.

Results: The response rate was 46.4%. Most practitioners reported seeing children; however, only 11.9% saw children before their first birthday. Most practitioners reported performing oral hygiene procedures for young children, but few dentists provide restorative services or discuss caries risk. Among the respondents, 69 (18.6%) reported seeing only one child per year aged 23 months or less, while 98 (29.0%) responded by saying that they did not see children in their practices. Of the practitioners who do not see infants under 23 months, the most common reason for not doing so was because they prefer to refer children this age to a pediatric dentist (69.3%), followed by practitioners' belief that children this age do not need care (34.2%); 26.3% of respondents acknowledged they were not comfortable seeing children of this age.

Conclusion: Infant oral health care needs to go beyond oral hygiene to include prevention and restoration of caries. It is critical to address the reasons why the practitioners do not see infants less than 23 months and to help them seeing more infants.