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The discharge letter: a tool to reduce paediatric dental caries

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Background:

Children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to experience dental caries and require more teeth extracted under dental general anaesthetic (DGA) than those from less deprived backgrounds. Written communication with the referring dentist following DGA is essential to ensure enhanced prevention is implemented to reduce the public health burden of dental disease and prevent repeat DGA.

Objectives:

To ensure that a letter and treatment plan (including preventive advice in line with current recommendations) is sent to the referring dentist following every DGA.

Methods:

The records of all patients discharged from King's Dental Institute following DGA in February 2020 were accessed and assessed for inclusion of a discharge letter containing a preventive care and treatment plan.

Results:

Sixty-five records were sampled and two (3%) included a discharge letter. Fifty-eight of the total sample had a caries diagnosis. Template letters including a treatment plan were produced to simplify the discharge letter process. A further 63 records were resampled and 58 (92%) included a discharge letter. Fifty-three of the total sample had a caries diagnosis. All letters included a preventive care and treatment plan.

Conclusion:

A simple process for a discharge letter has ensured that referring dentists are aware of treatment and prevention requirements for children who have undergone DGA. Without this communication this high caries risk group may be lost to follow up, experience further caries and require additional treatment in secondary care. However, long-term follow up of these patients would be beneficial to assess the impact of this process.

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