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Perceptions towards dental care provision among adults with Cystic Fibrosis: a cross-sectional questionnaire study

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Background:

Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is an autosomal recessive condition, characterised by thick mucus secretions in multiple organ systems. Life expectancy of people with CF (PWCF) has increased from 11 years in 1978 to mid-50s in 2019. People with special medical care needs may be less likely to access dental care and PWCF have been shown to attend the dentist less frequently than recommended.

Objectives:

To carry out a cross sectional qualitative study to investigate the attitudes of adults with CF towards dental attendance and any perceived barriers to treatment.

Methods:

A structured, anonymous online questionnaire was used to obtain information regarding the feelings among adults with CF towards accessing and receiving dental treatment. Ethical approval was obtained. Patient and Public Involvement was employed by collaboration with patient advocates. Participants were recruited via CF Ireland's mailing list and social media channels (n= approximately 500). The responses underwent descriptive statistical analysis and inductive thematic analysis.

Results:

A total of 71 PWCF (33 male, 38 female) responded to the survey. The majority (54.9%, n=39) were unhappy with their teeth. A large number (63.4%, n =45) felt that CF had an impact on their oral health. Respondents believed this is due to medications, dietary requirements, tiredness and other effects of CF. Over a third (33.8%, n=24) were anxious regarding their dentist. Reasons included cross infection concerns, issues with the dentist, tolerating dental treatment, and with the teeth themselves. Respondents wanted dentists to be aware of the practicalities of dental treatment for PWCF, especially their discomfort with lying back. They also wanted the dentist to be aware of the impact their medication, treatment, and diet has on their oral health.

Conclusions:

Over one third of adults with CF reported anxiety regarding dental attendance. PWCF want dentists to be aware of the impact that CF can have upon oral health care.

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