

The Face of a Child: Dental Education

Dental care is the most common unmet health care need of children. Those at increased risk for problems with oral health and access to care are from poor or minority families, or have special health care needs. These factors place more than 50 percent of children at risk for untreated oral disease. Measures of access and parental report indicate unmet oral health needs, but do not provide guidance as to the nature of children's oral health needs. Children's oral health needs can be predicted from their developmental changes and position in the life span, their dependency and environmental context, and current demographic changes. Specific gaps in education include training of general dentists to care for infants and young children and those with special health care needs, as well as training of pediatric providers and other professionals caring for children in oral health promotion and disease prevention. Educational focus on the technical aspects of dentistry leaves little time for important interdisciplinary health and/or social issues. It will not be possible to address these training gaps without further integration of dentistry with medicine and other health professions. Children's oral health care is the shared moral responsibility of dental and other professionals working with children, parents, and society. Academic dental centers hold in trust the training of oral health professionals for society and have a special responsibility to train future professionals to meet children's needs.

Balwant Rai, Jasdeep Kaur, Rajnish K Jain