

Dental Update Series – “Why does patient mental health matter?”

Dear Professor Burke,

Following the positive response to the Dental Update Series “Why does patient mental health matter?” we felt readers might also be interested in our recent ‘Right to Smile’ consensus statement which has been endorsed by several national and international dental and mental health organisations. The statement can be accessed here:

https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/documents/fhm/spectrum/Oral_Health_Consensus_Statement.pdf

Importantly, this statement sets out 5-year targets for whole person care to improve oral health in people with severe mental illness. Over the next five years any person experiencing severe mental ill health should expect their risk of poor oral health to be reduced by more effective whole-person care.

This will require a joined-up approach involving dental teams. Key targets which readers may wish to consider and incorporate in dental management of people with SMI are as follows:

1. Any assessment of physical health in people experiencing severe mental ill health must include consideration of oral health.

This target is currently being implemented nationally and locally via primary care and mental health teams. Readers who are working in dental practice may receive contact from these teams requesting dental access for patients with SMI.

2. Access to dental services for people with severe mental ill health needs to improve

Our team is currently exploring use of link workers to enable and support dental access for people with SMI. Readers in dental practice may wish to engage in dialogue with local commissioners should they wish to provide additional services for this vulnerable group.

3. The importance of oral health for people experiencing severe mental ill health should be recognised in healthcare training, systems, and structures

We have published our recent dental update series and consensus statement to highlight the importance of oral health in people with severe mental illness. An online module to supplement this series has also been produced and is being adopted by several dental schools to raise awareness in this area amongst undergraduate students.

In response to increasingly robust evidence, [The Right to Smile](#) campaign believes that tackling this health inequality is overdue and deserves urgent attention. If we equip people with the right knowledge and skills, while supporting the adoption of healthy routines including regular dental check-ups before things go wrong, we can make a real difference to an individual’s health and their well-being. We urge readers to consider, support and implement this initiative in their own service delivery.

Kind Regards

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