Oral Health Perceptions And Practices Among Stroke Patients In Ghana And Nigeria

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Background: Stroke is a major public health problem that is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. The disabilities experienced by patients with stroke increase their risk of poor oral health. This affects their general well-being and the outcome of the stroke.

Aim: To determine the oral health perception and practices of health care professionals, patients with stroke and their caregivers.

Methods: This is the qualitative aspect of an ongoing study to determine the oral health perception and treatment needs of patients with acute stroke. Information on oral health perceptions and practices was collected in stroke units in two teaching hospitals in; Ghana and Nigeria. Qualitative interviews of patients with acute stroke or their relatives; and health-care professionals were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires as guides.

Results: A total of 23 health-care professionals, 6 caregivers and 5 stroke patients were interviewed. Health-care professionals considered oral health important for both aesthetic and clinical reasons. They, however reported being unable to give it the required attention due to focus on the clinical needs of the acute stroke patients. Patients with stroke were unable to attend to their oral health needs and depended on health-care professionals and/or relatives. There were no clearly defined roles for caregivers in managing the oral hygiene of their relatives with stroke.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that oral health and practices promoting good oral hygiene are perceived as very important among patients with stroke. Stroke units should have a deliberate oral health care plan incorporated into the patient care plan.