

ABSTRACT

Dental Health Education & Promotion in the Ministry of Health Schools Dental Programme, Jamaica

Myrna L. Davis

This study was carried out to assess the current status of the Dental Health Education/Promotion within the School Dental Health Programme of the Ministry of Health, Jamaica. Sixty-four (64) Dental Nurses and forty-eight (48) Dental Assistants representing fifty percent (50%) of the Dental Auxiliary staff from all four (4) health regions made up the sample. The population was stratified geographically by region and then categorically (Dental Nurses and Dental Assistants). The systematic random sampling method was used to select fifty percent (50%) of each category in each region. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data.

Among the major constraints identified were a lack of up-to-date material and equipment for health promotional activities and a demotivated staff.

The results indicated that regardless of the constraints, the Dental Health Programme was continuous in all types of schools, the clinic facility and the community. Most (81.4%) staff did one or two dental health education sessions per week. These sessions were mostly done through specially arranged classes, most frequently using the lecture method. The elements of health promotion identified were Preventive Resin Restoration (PRR), Prophylaxis, Sealant, Atraumatic Restorative Treatment (ART), Diet Counseling, Plaque Control, and Topical Fluoride Treatment.

There is little progress in these areas due largely to lack of equipment and material. Figures from the Annual Report (Table 2) indicated that not much was done, however, in verifying this in the focus group discussions, it was reported as part of restorations or other activities. The motivation for production was based more on numerical target than needs assessment.

A national salt fluoridation programme has been in effect for more than a decade. Results of the programme are remarkable, reducing the number of Decayed, Missing, and Filled Teeth (DMFT) in 12 year olds from 6.7 to 1.2 in 10 years. This success has to be maintained and can only be done through the political will of the nation to enhance the Schools' Health Education/Promotion Programme done by the Auxiliaries. There are approximately 557,912 children between the ages of 4 and 19 – the age range within which coverage is given by this Programme. With the current number of auxiliaries – 138 Nurses and 96 Dental Assistants, how can adequate coverage be given?

There is no doubt that future preventive promotional strategies will depend increasingly on government policies, in addition to individual effort and a collaborative approach involving non-dental personnel and other sectors of society.