

Dental care for drug users in Norway: Dental professionals' attitudes to treatment and experiences with interprofessional collaboration

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Abstract

Objective: The present study aimed to assess dental professionals' attitudes and experiences related to the dental treatment of drug users and experiences with interprofessional collaboration with the rehabilitation institutions.

Materials and methods: The study population comprised 141 dentists and dental hygienists (response rate 73%) working in the Public Dental Service (PDS) in three counties in Norway. All of the participants completed an electronically distributed questionnaire on existing practices and experiences regarding dental treatment for drug users and interprofessional collaboration with rehabilitation institutions (RIs). The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the study.

Results: The majority of dentists and dental hygienists in the present study used more time for examination and treatment of drug users compared to other patient groups. Over 70% of dental clinicians considered drug users as demanding patients due to fear, missing appointments, and poor compliance with oral hygiene advice. The overall perception was that drug users often had higher expectations of dental treatment than what could be defined as necessary care and provided by the PDS. One-third of dental professionals reported that they were satisfied with the collaboration they had with RIs. Most of the respondents agreed that personnel from rehabilitation institutions could positively influence interprofessional collaboration by having sufficient knowledge of drug users' statutory rights to free of charge dental treatment, as well as by close follow-up and motivation of patients before dental treatment.

Conclusions: Dental professionals perceived the management of drug users as demanding due to dental fear, difficulties in coping with appointments, poor compliance to preventive measures, and disagreement between dental treatment defined as necessary and drug users' expectations.

Organizational barriers regarding leadership, accessibility, and collaborative routines, as well as lack of interprofessional communication, suggest current models of health care delivery to drug users need reviewing.

Full Text

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However, the manuscript can be downloaded and accessed as a PDF.