

The PREVENT study: Reducing the X factor - understanding the relationship between general practice prescribing and xerostomia

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Introduction

Dry mouth is a pervasive problem which can lead to an increased risk of oral and general health problems such as increase levels of tooth decay, difficulties eating and difficulties wearing dentures. Many dry mouth sufferers report a decrease in their quality of life. Dry mouth is much more common in those taking certain medications and, as our population ages, the number of people taking multiple medications is rapidly increasing. General medical practitioners (GMPs) prescribe medications that can cause dry mouth on a daily basis and frequently come into contact with a group of people that may have dry mouth; GMPs are therefore ideally placed to give initial advice to their patients with dry mouth.

Aims

- To improve the level of knowledge of General Medical Practitioners (GMPs) regarding the oral health risks of prescribing medications causing salivary deficiency;
- To utilize GMPs as a first line for identifying those at increased risk from dental caries (and other saliva-related oral health problems); and
- To equip GMPs to provide general oral health advice.

Rationale

This project will stimulate GMPs' awareness of oral health outcomes for a large (and increasing) group of at-risk patients, in addition to contributing much-needed information to the under-researched evidence base of GMP/ dentist collaboration.

Methodology

The project will be conducted in four consecutive parts, using mixed methods:

1. GMPs' knowledge and practices – interviews
2. Designing and implementing an education module
3. Designing and implementing a GMP prevention intervention
4. Assessing the uptake and acceptability of the GMP prevention intervention

What are the expected outcomes?

It is anticipated this project will:

- contribute much-needed information to the under researched evidence base of GMP/dentist collaboration;
- stimulate GMPs' awareness of oral health outcomes for a large (and increasing) group of at-risk patients;
- inform and develop a model designed to improve patient oral and general health outcomes; and
- potentially extend to other patient groups.

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Preliminary findings

- 20 GMPs were interviewed about their knowledge and awareness about dry mouth and oral health – this information was used to design a Clinical Module and GMP Prevention Intervention which the GMPs could use in their daily practice to identify and manage patients with dry mouth
- The dry mouth Clinical Module was very well received by GMPs
- 12 GMPs recruited 210 patients at high risk for dry mouth
- 45% of those patients were identified as having dry mouth
- Identifying patients at risk looked at two factors (age and medication status) and could be done by the GMP or other suitable practice staff
- Existing referral networks between GMPs and dental practitioners were extremely limited
- GMPs saw the referral mechanism within the program as a positive method of improving communication
- The study successfully implemented a simple, generalisable model which empowered GMPs to identify patients at risk of dry mouth, diagnose dry mouth and implement a dry mouth management intervention that included improved communication between GMPs and dentists.

Next steps

- Publication in a peer reviewed journal(s)

