

Dental fear and anxiety as a barrier to accessing oral health care among patients with special health care needs.

Gordon, Sharon M DDS MPH; Dionne, RA DDS PhD; Snyder, James DDS. *Journal of Special Care in Dentistry*. Vol. 18. No. 2, 1998, March/April, Pg.

***Persons with special health care needs due to physical and cognitive impairment can be at increased risk for dental disease which can be attributed to, as well as exacerbate, existing medical conditions. This study assessed the nature of perceived barriers to obtaining oral health care among a special-needs population and the influence of these factors (in particular, fear and anxiety) on utilization of dental services. A total of 27.9% of the sample reported fear/anxiety about dental visits, with approximately half of those reporting to be very nervous or "terrified". There was an inverse relationship between the frequency of dental visits and the proportion of respondents reporting themselves as very nervous or terrified, and between the perception of oral health status and the level of dental fear/anxiety ( $P < 0.001$ ). A large difference was reported between patient preference for pharmacologic modalities for anxiety control and those received at dental visits, with 40% of the youngest age group indicating that they would go to the dentist more frequently if sedation or general anesthesia were offered. The levels of self-reported fear/anxiety and the high proportion of respondents indicating an unmet need for adjunctive anesthesia services suggest that fear/anxiety acts as a barrier to dental care among this special-needs group which could be ameliorated with greater use of these services.***

