



PRECISION DENTAL MEDICINE

Characterization of the oral health status and literacy among a sample of Portuguese elderly

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Background

Health literacy is a main factor in health for its improvement, allowing the individuals to have a greater capacity to engage and participate in collective health promotion actions. In dentistry, oral health literacy (OHL) is the ability to understand information regarding dental services, as well as the prevention, control, and treatment of oral problems. The aim of this study was to characterize the oral health status, behaviors and oral health literacy of a sample of participants in the “Atividade Senior” program developed by the municipality of Viseu, Portugal.

Materials and Methods

An observational cross-sectional study was designed with a sample of 206 participants of the program that accepted responding to the questionnaire and the application of the Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Dentistry (REALD-29PT), validated for the Portuguese population. An intra-oral observation was accomplished to determine the oral health status of the participant and the decayed, missing and filled teeth index was determined (DMFT index). All the participants signed an explicit and informed consent, and the research was approved by the Health Ethics Committee of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, with the approval registration number 100.

Results

As for gender, 69.4% (n=143) are women and 30.6% (n=63) men, with an average age of 70.0±7.16. Regarding oral health behaviors (table 1), 31.7% brush once a day, 81.6% do not use dental floss nor other methods of interdental hygiene and 55.8% had a dental appointment in the last 12 months. The DMFT index was 10.38±8.55, with the higher score corresponding to the missing teeth component (11.96±8.56) and 43.9% of the sample use a dental prosthesis. Regarding the application of the REALD-29PT, we can verify that 22.7% have low OHL (score from 0-14), 43.7% moderate OHL (score from 15-22) and 33.6% high OHL (score 23-29).

Conclusions

Oral health literacy presents a satisfactory level among more active older adults. However, the reinforcement of oral health promotion strategies is needed to improve oral health status and literacy among the community. These strategies should pass by the development of teaching methods based on oral health behaviors for the community and the implementation of oral health promotion programs directed to adults.

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Oral Health Behaviors	n	%
Daily brushing		
Yes	186	90,3
No	20	9,7
Number of brushings/day		
1 time/day	59	31,7
2 time/day	87	46,8
3 or more times/day	40	21,5
Daily interdental hygiene		
Yes	38	18,4
No	168	81,6
Dental appointment		
Last appointment was less than 12 months ago	115	55,8
Last appointment was more than 1 year and less than 2 years ago	39	18,9
Last appointment was more than 5 years ago	52	25,3
Need for a dental appointment		
Yes	170	82,5
No	36	17,5
REALD30 Rating		
Percentile 1 (0-14) Low	47	22,7
Percentile 2 (15-22) Moderate	90	43,7
Percentile 3 (23-30) High	69	33,6

Table 1 – Oral Health Behaviors

