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The Impact of Oral Health on Low-Income Pregnant Women living in the U.S

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BACKGROUND



Oral health has a significant impact on pregnancy outcomes. Interprofessional collaboration can assist in bridging the gap between oral and systemic health and assist in optimizing the health of low-income pregnant women, infants, and children.

METHODS

A literature review was conducted to ascertain the impact of oral health on adverse pregnancy outcomes. Research sources used in this literature review were gathered from the U.S. National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health, PubMed, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Elsevier, Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), the Office of the Surgeon General, and Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria were pregnant women.

RESULTS

Poor dental health during pregnancy can contribute to adverse pregnancy outcomes and contributes to early childhood caries. Conversely, many systemic diseases can present oral signs and symptoms. Low-income women are disproportionately affected due to limited or no access to oral health care through their health insurance, or due to poor quality health care. The socio-ecological model was used to identify factors that affect oral health at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and public policy levels.

DISCUSSION



Studies have shown that interprofessional collaboration with health care professionals and other non-dental professionals can improve pregnant women's oral health. Prenatal care that includes oral health screening, education, and referrals can mitigate the risk of oral diseases during pregnancy and the postpartum period. A systems change approach can be utilized to create a collaborative effort in addressing this public health issue.

CONCLUSIONS

Collaborative relationships between oral health providers and medical providers using evidence-based practices are beginning to take hold. Several interprofessional models of oral-systemic health intervention currently exist to increase knowledge of the recognized link between the oral cavity and the rest of the body. It is important to target a range of health providers who are most likely to care for underserved and vulnerable populations with limited or no access to oral health care services. Expansion of programs and initiatives are imperative to increase the dental educational base of medical professionals and to improve the lives of women, infants, and children.

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