KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE AMONGST GYNECOLOGISTS AND PEDIATRICIANS ABOUT ORAL HEALTH IN MANGALORE CITY: A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

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This study aimed to evaluate pediatricians' and gynecologists' knowledge, attitude and practice about oral health in Mangalore city. Pre-tested questionnaire containing close ended questions comprised of 11 and 10 questions for Gynecologists and Pediatricians respectively. Total sample comprised of forty nine Pediatricians and thirty three Gynecologists of Mangalore city. The present study showed pediatrician had better knowledge about oral health compared to gynecologists.

Key words: Gynecologists, Pediatricians, Knowledge, Oral health, Questionnaire study

Gynecologists and Pediatricians are specialists who enter a child's life at an early stage. They counsel mothers on nutrition, feeding practices and immunization. They also evaluate the overall health of pregnant mothers and developmental progress of children. It is proven in the literature that when the weaning period is prolonged it will lead to the single most common chronic childhood disease - dental caries[1]. The most important factor which affects the preventive dentistry performance is the knowledge and practice of medical professionals concerning this issue. Unless dental care is a strong priority in all health service programs, comprehensive health care cannot be achieved[2]. Since Gynecologists and Pediatricians are more likely to see expecting mothers and infants much earlier than dentists, it is essential for these specialists to be aware of the infectious nature of dental caries and its associated risk. This will help them make appropriate decisions regarding timely and effective intervention[1].

Aim of the study

To assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of oral health amongst Gynecologists and Pediatricians in Mangalore city.

Materials and methods

A cross-sectional questionnaire survey was conducted among Gynecologists and Pediatricians who were associated with various health institutions and private practices in Mangalore city, India. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was done among six post-graduate students of the same specialty. Without much change, questionnaire was finalized. All questions were closed ended. Questionnaire comprised of 11 and 10 questions for Gynecologists and Pediatricians respectively. Five medical colleges were considered for sample frame along with the private practitioners in Mangalore city. The selection was done randomly. One college was excluded because consent was not given. Prior permission was taken from respective Deans. Total sample comprised of **forty nine** Pediatricians and **thirty three** Gynecologists of Mangalore city. They were personally met and Questionnaire along with letter describing purpose of study was given. The correct answers were told to them after collecting the questionnaires back. All answers were treated with utmost confidentiality. Results were statistically analyzed using SPSS 11.5 package to give percentages of correct response.

Results

The Results are summarized as follows:

Pediatricians:

1) When asked about age of first tooth eruption- 94% said that first tooth erupts at 6 months.
2) The question was total number of deciduous teeth in a 4year old child- 87% of pediatricians had given correct answer.
3) About 87% of the pediatricians said that medicated syrup contains sugar.

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4) Regarding the referral of a child patient to pedodontist 61% of them said it should be done only when the child complains of any dental problem.
5) About 89% of pediatricians said that thumb sucking habit is harmful.
6) Regarding teething in children, 74% of them said it is observed frequently.
7) About 37% of them said no need of prescribing toothpastes to a child below 4yrs.
8) Regarding the advice to a mother to stop bottle feeding by what age- 65% of them had given the correct answer.
9) About 61% of pedodontist advised mothers to clean the infants gum pads.
10) About 87% of them were inspecting the child's oral cavity during general check-up.

Gynecologists:

1) About 75% of them knew about the side-effects of tetracycline on teeth.
2) About 64% of them knew about effectiveness of prenatal exposure of fluoride on the developing dentition.
3) 93% of gynecologists said that oral health has an effect on the systemic health of a pregnant mother.
4) Regarding the referral of a pregnant mother for dental checkup, about 75% of them said it should be done only when the mother complains of dental problems.
5) 50% of them said that forceps delivery is not at all related to orofacial defects.
6) 89% of gynecologists said that second trimester is the safest for the dental treatment of a mother.
7) 54% of them agreed that mothers' oral health is related to that of her child.
8) Regarding the nutritional supplement which are to be prescribed to a mother - 61% of them said that they should be in a mixed form.
9) 79% of them said that there is no need of prenatal diet counseling with regard to cariogenic foodstuff.
10) 32% of gynecologists were not aware of the effect of radiation exposure on the dentition of a child.
11) 68% of them said that natal teeth are observed in a new born.

Discussion

The present study showed pediatricians had better knowledge about oral health compared to gynecologists. One important factor noticed here was that majority of the pediatricians make referrals to a pediatric dentist whereas, only a small number of gynecologists refer pregnant mothers to pediatric dentists for prenatal counseling. A study by Subramaniam P et al also reported the same. The cause of concern is 50% of gynecologists were not aware that forceps delivery is related to orofacial defects.

Conclusions from the study

Many of the dental diseases of childhood can be prevented by proper education of the parents. To achieve this, greater interaction between pedodontists, paediatricians and gynaecologists are required. This type of questionnaire study will act as a booster dose for paediatricians and gynaecologists. There is need for more communication between these two specialties of medicine and dentistry respectively.

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