‘Closing the Gap’—adult Indigenous oral health needs in small, remote Aboriginal communities

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Aim: To understand and consider ‘Closing the Gap’ for Aboriginal adult oral health needs by measuring and describing these needs for three small remote Aboriginal communities and proposing the dental service requirements to meet these needs.

Method: The oral examinations from adult patients presenting for oral health care over two years are reviewed and provisional treatment planning to complete a ‘Course of Adult Oral Health Care’ for the three Aboriginal communities of the KWHA have been developed. The treatment plans have identified dental procedures (fillings, extractions, scaling, construction of dentures etc) and estimated the time and number of required dental appointments to complete these oral health care plans. Indices of hours per adult patient, average number and time required for these treatment plan appointments and total weeks of oral health service delivery required are described.

Results: The assessment oral health status and measurement of oral disease often uses the measurements of dental caries experience (DMFT) and periodontal diseases (CPITN) to describe prevalence and extent of common oral diseases. This paper describes a methodology and the results of measuring the dental resources (time and money) required to treat oral disease within a primary oral care framework for populations with large unmet dental needs. Correlating these indices of DMFT and CPITN with the plans to complete the course of Adult Oral Health Care are discussed. These results are discussed within the context of policy development and aspiration to ‘Close the Gap’ of Indigenous oral health. This research proposes and describes a Primary Oral Care framework and Oral Health Care Plans and discusses these descriptions.

Recent announcements of a dental reform package and the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will be reviewed in the context of this analysis of adult indigenous oral health needs and ‘Closing the Gap’.