

Peninsula Dental develop resources to reduce dental anxiety in patients

Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE) Dental Outreach Team have developed a variety of resources to reduce dental anxiety in patients who may find dental visits challenging.

The 'My Mouth and Me' passport was created as a result of working alongside the Looked after Children Nursing Team as part of the Inter-Professional Engagement (IPE) module for second-year students. It became apparent that it was a challenge recording the dental preferences of looked-after children due to the often regular movements from family to family, at times across various local authorities and geographical areas. Ms Jemma Facenfield, who runs the 'Children in Care Clinic', supporting children and young people in the care system and who uses these resources in her work, said: 'We wanted to enable professionals supporting these children, the children themselves and/or their carers to record their oral health preferences, experiences and likes and dislikes in one centralised place that stays with the child. The aim of the passport is to be an engaging tool, owned by the child and to be held in the child health record (red book) enabling their dental information to be shared whenever they access support as Looked After Child or dental care'.

A second resource, 'Calming Kits', has been put together by the Dental Outreach Team and these are boxes made up of a variety of distraction toys and resources to help reduce anxiety in some patients who may find a dental appointment challenging. Designed predominantly for use with children, these kits can also be used by adults, when appropriate. The kits contain a variety of objects including fidget toys with repetitive motion such as spinning, clicking or rolling to act as a distraction, which calms the patient's anxious behaviour and boosts concentration due to their calming effect. The kit also contains ear defenders and sunglasses for those who are sensory avoidant and who may find lights and sound distressing, helping to reduce the anxiety and distraction associated with the brightness and sounds of clinic and enabling the patient to feel more comfortable and able to receive



treatment. All items have passed the infection control processes and can be used safely within the clinic environment. Abby Nelder, Dental Community Engagement Programme Officer in the Dental Outreach Team, said: 'The aim is to reduce dental anxiety and improve the dental experience among nervous or sensory avoidant patients when attending appointments at PDSE resulting in improved treatment outcomes'.

During 2020/2021, a group of dental students designed a children's workbook alongside Brook Green Centre for Learning as part of their IPE project. The workbook was so well received by the young people that the Dental Outreach Team developed the workbook for use on clinic to support children and young people (CYP) with additional needs or for use by those showing signs of anxiety. The workbook contains a variety of activities to help CYP understand the importance of maintaining positive oral health routines at home, what to expect at a dental appointment, along with tips to keep calm such as yoga and breathing. Feeling prepared for an appointment along with offering distraction activities within the workbook for the actual visit, it is hoped that the levels of anxiety are reduced. Abby said: 'It is hoped that by using the children's workbook alongside the new Sensory Calm Kits, children will be better equipped to reduce anxiety levels associated with attending dental appointments at PDSE'. The aim is that by giving the CYP a dental themed workbook prior to an appointment, they will feel better able to attend appointments, reduce anxiety with self-soothing techniques and become more aware of the importance of maintaining positive oral health routines at home.

Rob Witton (CEO of PDSE) said: 'PDSE are committed to improving the dental health of those living in the Southwest and strive to use innovative, creative methods to support the patients' dental journey. These resources enable our dental team and students to provide a first-class service and supports the provision of person-centred, inclusive care to our patients.'

Abigail Nelder, Dental Community Engagement Officer is happy to send electronic copies of these resources to interested readers. Please email abigail.nelder@plymouth.ac.uk.

