ORAL CARE BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Oral care best practice has evolved over the years with changes in practice supported by research. So what is best oral care for 2011?

Oral care is defined as the practice of keeping the mouth clean and healthy by brushing and flossing to prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

**Tools include:**
- An Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT). Clinicians need to look at and in the patients’ mouth including lips, tongue, gums, saliva, teeth (or dentures).
- Toothbrush, toothpaste and dental floss, possibly peroxide suction toothbrush or oral suction, a bite block if mouth does not stay open, and a tongue scraper.

**Teaching Tip:** oral care means “teeth, tongue, palate and cheeks” try saying that 3 times really fast to help you remember.

- An interprofessional approach including an oral care plan, knowledge of oral care and products and documentation.

**Research**

Oral care profoundly affects quality of life and health yet there is evidence that oral health care is not addressed to the same level especially when competing with other care needs.

Hydration and Nosocomial Pneumonia: Killing two birds with one stone (a toothbrush) by Farrell & Petrik (2009) provides clear compelling evidence that links nosocomial pneumonia with poor oral care. Despite traditional fears by health care professionals of food aspiration causing pneumonia it has been found that the greatest risk for aspiration pneumonia is the bacteria growing in patients mouths.

Oral care should be given a minimum of twice a day and up to four times a day for those with neurological disorders.

Limited dexterity, cognitive dysfunction, staff attitude, education and limited supplies have all been identified as barriers to best oral care however...

An interdisciplinary approach to oral health care improves knowledge, awareness and moves practices closer to best practice.

Oral care should be done first thing in the morning before breakfast to prevent aspiration of bacteria accumulated at back of throat overnight.

**Tip:** Oral swabs provide moisture only- they are not providing oral care.