

Geriatric oral health issues in Africa: Tanzanian perspective

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Abstract

A review of oral health issues for the elderly in Tanzania is presented and conclusions drawn from the analysis are applied to the broader African situation. It must be remembered that life expectancy (at birth) in Tanzania has been below or equal to 50 years, which places adults aged 35+ years in the elderly group of citizens. Access to professional care is limited, especially in rural areas, resulting in most people seeking care only when in severe pain and often leading to extraction. People aged 40+ years, who live in rural areas, are at higher risk of destructive periodontal disease and it is recommended that oral health education, focusing on behaviour change should be initiated from childhood. Innovative training programmes for primary health workers already working in rural areas can improve both access to professional care and accurate preventive oral health messages. Health professional training programmes should emphasise the importance of good oral health to overall health. Such an emphasis will help galvanise health care workers in the delivery of services. The ultimate goal for the government, health professionals and educators should be to move the Tanzanian people toward a greater understanding of oral health and the prevention of oral diseases, a goal which might also be set elsewhere in Africa.