

# Exploring Acute Geriatric Patients' Oral Care Experiences



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## Context, Problem, and Goals

**Who:** Older adult (ages 65+) patients.  
**What:** Inadequate oral care, which can contribute to pneumonia,<sup>1</sup> systemic diseases,<sup>2</sup> adverse health outcomes,<sup>3</sup> and decreased quality of life.<sup>4</sup>  
**Where:** St. Paul's Hospital Acute Care for Elders (ACE) Unit in Vancouver, British Columbia.  
**When:** Dec 2021 to July 2022.  
**Why:** A study to explore how to improve oral care, decrease the risk for adverse healthcare events, and improve patient health outcomes, satisfaction, and quality of life.  
**How:** 30 semi-structured interviews with patients and family on oral care experiences. Interpretive description methodology for qualitative analysis.

## Research Questions

- What are the oral care experiences of acute geriatric patients?
- What are acute geriatric patients' recommendations on improving patient oral care experiences?

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Our culturally-diverse research team worked hard to recruit a diverse sample, and we found representation in gender, language first spoken, and housing status. However, we did not note any major differences in oral care experiences so have compiled the findings.

### Demographics of 30 interviewed participants:

Characteristic	N=30
<b>Age (in years)</b>	M=82 (range: 69-94)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	15 (50%)
Female	15 (50%)
<b>Language first spoken</b>	
Asian	3 (10%)
Caribbean	1 (3%)
English	17 (57%)
European	6 (20%)
Indigenous	3 (10%)
<b>Highest education</b>	
Elementary school	2 (7%)
High school	7 (23%)
Post-secondary	21 (70%)
<b>Housing status</b>	
Facility	3 (10%)
Home owner	10 (33%)
Rental	14 (47%)
Social housing	3 (10%)

## To patients, a healthy mouth means...

### You are pain-free

- *I have no gum disease or bleeding or irritation or things like that. So, I assume it's healthy.*  
-Participant 7

### • Oral issues

- *I haven't brushed my teeth for a while; I would call it overly sensitive.*  
-Participant 14

### • Focus on medical treatment

- *Because they are treating me for a limb infection, so I didn't expect them to have any interest in my teeth.*  
-Participant 3

### • Overall health

- *That bacteria can spread to other sickness far easily. You see that's the important part is to make sure the mouth is not a breeding ground.*  
-Participant 22

- **Many believe they do not need dental care or oral assessments if they do not have oral pain or discomfort**
- **Associating lack of pain to being healthy can be detrimental, as infections can be painless**
- **By the time there is pain, this can mean periodontal disease has progressed**
- **A few acknowledge the connection of oral health to overall health**
- **How can we promote preventative oral care and dental care?**

## To patients, a healthy mouth means...

### You feel fresh and clean

- *Always feel fresh and clean the inside.*  
-Participant 20

### • Breath

- *It puts me off when people have eaten something and it carries them through the day and stuff like that. Ya, you know, keep your breath clean.*  
-Participant 19

### • Cleanliness

- *You're afraid other people might think you're not cleaned enough.*  
-Participant 24

### • Presentability

- *If they had a head of hair, they'd do their hair and look nice. They would do the same thing with teeth.*  
-Participant 14

### • Self confidence

- *I don't like to be with people who have bad breath so, by transference, I think if that's how I feel when I'm in their presence, how would they feel in my presence if my breath was bad? So, I'm very conscious of bad breath.*  
-Participant 9

### • Socialization

- *You gotta get in there and dig it out - the goo, floss, rinse, gargle. A fresh new day to meet new people.*  
-Participant 18

- **Feeling fresh and clean improves self confidence**
- **Having a clean fresh breath affects socialization**
- **Oral care affects self confidence and socialization**

## To patients, a healthy mouth means...

### You can enjoy food

- *If I don't have a clean mouth, it doesn't taste right; food doesn't taste right.*  
-Participant 10

### • Taste

- *Sometimes your mouth tastes awful. It tastes sour or whatever, depends on what you've had to eat. So, it's not very pleasant.*  
-Participant 2

### • Eating

- *When I eat, and I see that dirt in my mouth, I have to clean it. I feel like, um, throw up, cause my teeth are dirty.*  
-Participant 16

### • Comfort

- *Oral care to me is like having your mouth clean to taste food and to be comfortable.*  
-Participant 23

### • Food stuck in teeth

- *At night it seems like you don't want to go to bed with that food stuck on your teeth, if there is any.*  
-Participant 25

### • Feedback mechanism

- *Just after I've had my three meals; breakfast, lunch and dinner and I know I need to clean them.*  
-Participant 4

- **Food and meals provides a feedback mechanism to prompt oral care**
- **Having residual food in mouth affects comfort**
- **Routine oral care can improve patient comfort**

## To patients, a healthy mouth means...

### You have natural teeth

- *I have my own teeth and they are all there the way I want them and don't have to have dentures.*  
-Participant 1

### • Requires work

- *[Oral care] seems to be a little bit of a chore.*  
-Participant 25

### • Own responsibility

- *It's the fault of the person who's doing the teeth and they should do a good job on teeth.*  
Participant 14

### • Proud

- *I've still got most of my teeth...I have had excellent dental care from the time I entered school.*  
-Participant 9

### • Shame

- *A lot of patients, if they have a sore mouth, are not going to want to admit it.*  
-Participant 2

### • Regret and hopelessness

- *It's too late now. They're not going to start doing all these things now.*  
-Participant 11

- **Healthy oral care habits are perceived to be associated with natural teeth, which are more valued**
- **Healthy oral care habits are perceived to require hard work and is each person's responsibility, and those who have their natural teeth are proud**
- **Shame, regret, and hopelessness were noted in those who did not practice regular oral care or did not have their natural teeth**
- **How can we mitigate these negative feelings and promote oral care for everyone?**

## Barriers to Oral Health

Routine oral care can be affected by finances, special care requirements (e.g., dentures and bridges), mobility, and dependency.

- *Dentists are very **expensive** and as far as if I need one, I see one.*  
-Participant 22
- *With **dentures**, you get more food stuck in your mouth than you do with regular teeth. So, it can be very uncomfortable.*  
-Participant 2
- *I'm just getting back to **walking** so the nurse brings the wheelchair to the bed, I get uncovered, I throw my legs out, I step off the bed, hold this and sit down, swing around and I can get into the bathroom by myself.*  
-Participant 5
- *At this point in time in my life, I have the **numbness** in my hands and fingers. I hope they can be nice enough to push the buttons for me on my toothbrush; maybe apply the toothpaste on the toothbrush.*  
-Participant 1

## Advice From Patients to Staff

HAVE ADEQUATE ORAL CARE KNOWLEDGE

STANDARDIZED APPROACH

KNOW IF YOUR PATIENT HAS DENTURES

REGULARLY DO MOUTH CHECKS

LEARN YOUR PATIENT'S ROUTINE

PROVIDE ADEQUATE SUPPLIES

NEGOTIATE A TIME FOR ORAL CARE

GROUP SUPPLIES AND LABEL THEM

OFFER HELP AND REMINDERS

ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

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### SCAN ME

FOR CONTACT INFORMATION, OUR COMPLETE PROJECT, AND REFERENCE LIST

