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Research Question

What oral health programs in long-term care facilities improve oral health outcomes?

Abstract

The need for effective oral hygiene programs in long-term care (LTC) veterans facilities is crucial due to the rise in the elderly population, as well as untreated caries in older adults. As a state, Maine has 15% of older adults with untreated caries, 41% with gingivitis, 14% with periodontal diseases, and 2.7% with oral and pharyngeal cancer death rates.¹ It would serve the residents and team of caregivers well to have an interprofessional approach to the overall care of their patients. It is essential for LTC residents to receive proper oral hygiene care and dental professionals are not often staffed by these facilities.²

Of the literature reviewed, one study indicated 48% of the LTC staff were very satisfied with the quality of oral care provided to the residents and 77% reported considering on-site oral care services.³ Another study indicated care conferences conducted in LTC facilities (LTCF) influenced the staff's awareness of oral health.² While studies have shown that improving the oral health in the older adult population is of great importance, additional research is needed to determine the most effective interventions to improve the oral health of LTC residents. Although interdisciplinary teams are often used in LTCF, the teams often lack a dental professionals. As a result, there is a lack of oral health care within LTCF and further research needs to be conducted in order to bring further awareness to this issue.

Introduction

- 19,209,704 total veterans in the US as of September 2019⁴
- 7,188,493 of total population is 70+ years old⁴
- Top three states with the highest percentage of Veterans in 2017 were: Alaska, Maine, and Montana⁵
 - State of ME has 15% of older adults with untreated caries¹
- Decrease seen in tooth loss in elderly population⁶
- Veterans must meet certain requirements in order to receive dental benefits⁷

SNA's surveyed on OH Care in LTCF Figure 1

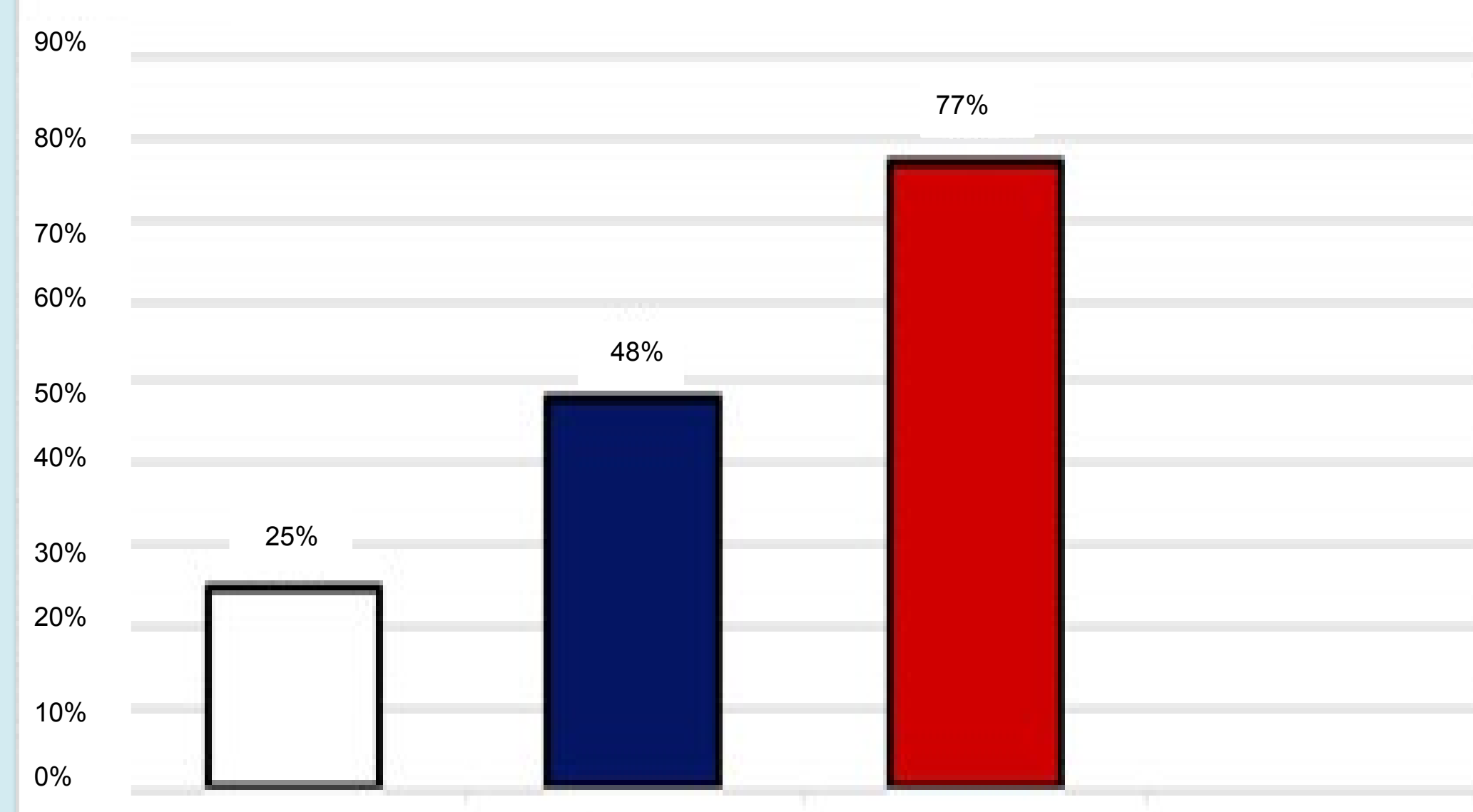
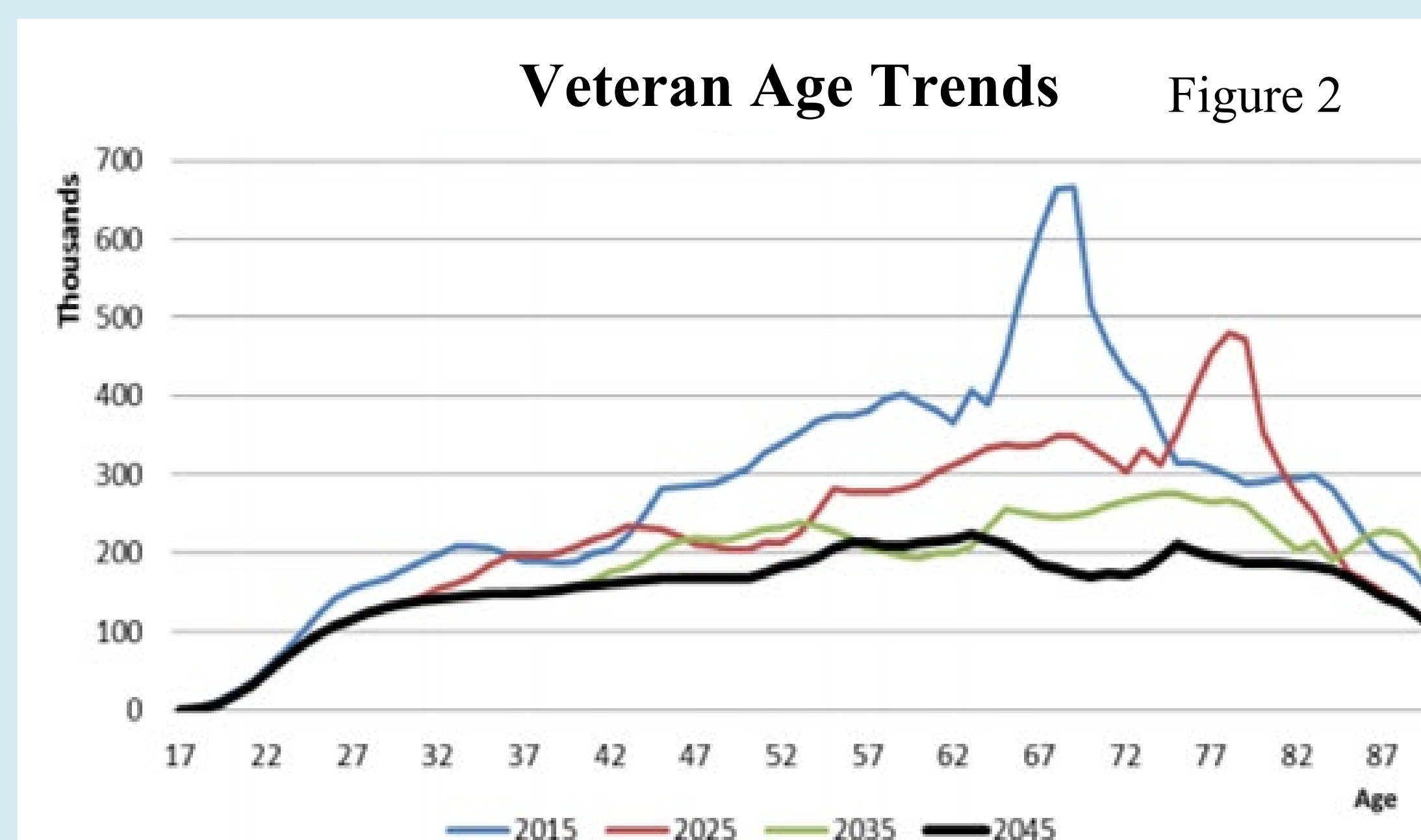


Figure 1 graphic shows Supervising Nurse Admins (SNA's) surveyed on oral health care in LTCF³

Key:
 - Familiar with DH expertise
 - Very satisfied with current quality
 - Would consider on-site mobile oral care

Figure 2 graphic shows Veteran age trends over the next 30 years⁴



Review of Literature

- DH interdisciplinary care conferences⁸
 - Increases LTC staff on awareness of oral health
 - Staff welcome conferences
- Dental students educating nursing staff & family members on oral health care⁹
 - Increase oral cancer awareness
- Oral care posters, workshops, and identification of oral health champions¹⁰
 - Increases oral health knowledge
 - Helps overcome barriers (behavior, communication, and materials) when providing care to residents
- Other findings
 - Nurses prefer dental professionals to perform staff trainings, screenings, dental referrals, and fluoride varnish programs²
 - Nursing staff access to oral care supplies and the use of standardized documentation systems results in reduced oral plaque and gingivitis of residents¹¹

Discussion

- Inadequate oral care compromises the quality of life of residents¹⁰
- Interprofessional collaboration increases awareness of oral care¹⁰
- Documentation of an individual's oral health (OH) care and needs increases recognition of patient OH status¹¹
- OH education programs have a positive impact on an elderly persons OH⁸
- Need to establish a model of care involving OH care professionals¹²
- Limitations
 - Lack of research specific to Veteran's in LTCF
- Future Research
 - Veteran specific care in LTCF
 - Effect of shift changes on proper documentation
 - Program development in Veteran's LTCF

Conclusion

In review of the literature, it can be concluded that there is a need for dental professionals in long-term care and interprofessional programs appear to have the greatest impact. Having a dental professional as part of the LTCF team will increase access to dental care, oral hygiene products, and improve the overall oral health of LTC residents. It is also clear that documentation of care is a key aspect to success of any program. Future research is needed to continue to grow the body of literature around oral health in LTCFs specific to the veteran population.

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