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The inequality of children's oral health demonstrates the need for greater effort to engender more preventative strategies, says Denplan

The current state of children's oral health in the UK has once again been making the headlines this week. Whilst Denplan welcomes the news from Public Health England that the number of five year olds with tooth decay has dropped to its lowest level in almost a decade, there is still much greater effort needed to install better prevention strategies in order to eradicate this entirely preventable dental disease in the child population.

Commenting on the PHE survey results, Henry Clover, Chief Dental Officer at Denplan said: "Although the figures show that the number of five year olds with tooth decay has dropped from 31% in 2008 down to less than 25%, this still represents a quarter of the country's five years olds suffering from an entirely preventable disease. Focusing on comparing data to previous years is not that helpful and the government, working with the profession, must not shy away from seeking to tackle this problem head on.

"The current NHS contract makes it more difficult for dentists to care for children with the worst dental health, a key factor in the need to reform the system introduced in 2006. Any new contract, must put prevention strategies at the forefront and recognise that good dental health in childhood is vital, not only for lifelong oral wellbeing, but for good overall health.

"Denplan believes that a dental health assessment should happen by the age of one to prevent early onset of disease. Denplan's research conducted with YouGov revealed that only one in five parents of children aged 18 or under (19%) said they first took their child to the dentist before 12 months of age¹."

The PHE statistics also revealed that in some areas, such as the North West, a third of five year olds (33.4%) are suffering from tooth decay, compared to only a fifth (20.1%) in the South East.



“This inequality in children’s oral health demonstrates there is still a huge regional variation, with areas of higher levels of deprivation tending to have higher levels of tooth decay. Investment must continue to be targeted to areas where access to dental services is low to improve provision and inequalities. The development of more multi-skilled dental teams could also help provide more effective and economical outcomes in helping treat children with more extensive oral health needs. Therapists, hygienists and dental nurses could also play a crucial role in this.”

Last but not least, Denplan believes there is still a lot of work to be done to engender more preventative behaviours amongst the public as a further report this week² revealed that four in ten people fail to brush their teeth at least once a day.

Henry Clover concluded: “Dentists and their practice teams can also play their part by taking responsibility for improving oral health in their own communities by engaging with local authorities, schools, early years and other health services and helping to raise awareness of the links between oral health and overall health. The training of other health and care professionals such as midwives, school nurses, social workers and care home workers will also help ensure oral health messages are more widely disseminated, thereby helping to engender more preventive behaviours amongst the public.”

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Sources:

¹ Denplan/YouGov Survey. Total sample size was 5,152 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th-20th January 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

² <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2016/05/40-dont-use-a-toothbrush-at-least-once-a-day-441471/> (Accessed on the 11th May)

Notes to Editors: About Denplan

Denplan Limited is the UK’s leading dental payment plan specialist owned by Simplyhealth; with more than 6,500 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.7 million customers. Established in 1986 by two dentists who pioneered the concept of dental payment plans, Denplan has been at the heart of dental care for nearly 30 years. Today, Denplan has a wide range of dental plans for adults and children, enabling patients to spread the cost of their private dental care through a fixed monthly fee. Denplan supports regular attendance and preventive care, reducing the need for clinical intervention and helping patients to maintain healthy teeth and gums for life. Patient enquiries telephone: 0800 401 402 Dentist enquiries telephone: 0800 328 3223

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Denplan also provides a range of professional services for its member dentists and their practice teams, including the Denplan Quality Programme, Denplan Excel Certification Programme and Denplan Training. Plus regulatory advice, business and marketing consultancy services and networking opportunities.

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In 2011, we acquired Denplan Limited, the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist. Simplyhealth has 1,391 employees based across our offices in Andover, Manchester, Leeds and Denplan in Winchester. We serve our 3.5 million customers through cash plans, dental plans, Denplan and pet health plans. Simplyhealth has Independent Living Centres which provide daily living and mobility products, including powerchairs, mobility scooters and wheelchairs, in Andover, Bristol, Burnham, Droitwich, Kenilworth, Leeds, Northfield, Norwich, Sutton Coldfield, Telford, Willenhall and Wolverhampton.

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