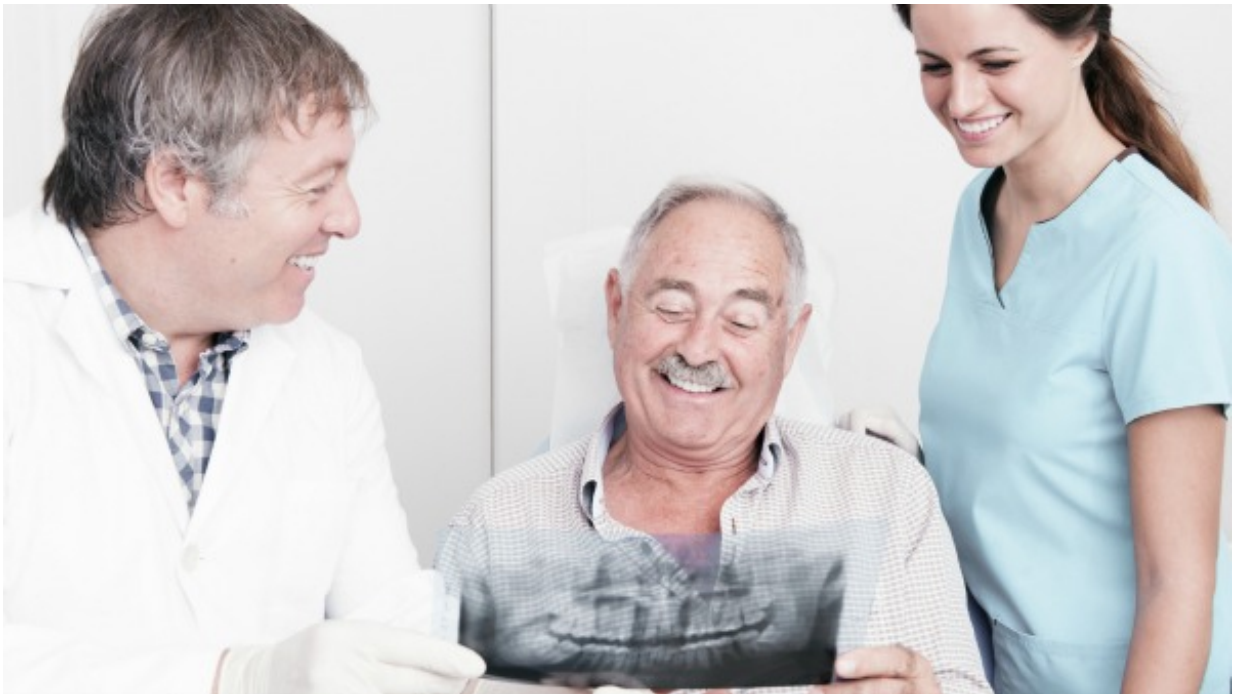


Greater collaboration key to better geriatric dental health

December 10 2015, by Anika Rodgers



Prof Slack-Smith says there is a strong need for specialised geriatric dentistry in Australia because the current system to meet the oral health needs of this population isn't working. Credit: iStock

More collaboration between dentists and better education for carers could significantly improve dental care for residents in Perth's aged-care facilities.

These findings are the result of a small study by University of Western Australia School of Dentistry researchers who quizzed dental professionals in order to understand the barriers to better oral health for elderly people.

Australia's ageing population is increasing with more people keeping their own teeth, however they're not in a good condition, often requiring complex dental work.

"One of the things that really came through from the study was that many dental professionals wanted to help in this area, but most dentists work in isolation, they're not working as part of an inter-professional care team which makes it difficult," UWA Prof Linda Slack-Smith says.

The government provides a dental check service to people in aged care but Prof Slack-Smith says they are often short-staffed.

"Our evidence shows many people in aged care aren't getting any dental services, or they're not getting adequate services," Prof. Slack-Smith says.

The researchers interviewed 17 dental professionals for the study (five dentists, three oral health therapists and nine [dental hygienist](#)) across Australia from 2013-2015.

It's important to understand everyone's point of view to create a tailored solution, Prof Slack-Smith says.

"We wanted to really understand what people think, feel and how it affects their lives. There are very different perspectives, and there are challenges in providing dental care for older Australians," she says.

Prof Slack-Smith says there is a strong need for specialised geriatric

dentistry in Australia because the current system to meet the [oral health](#) needs of this population isn't working.

"We need to improve our general training of dental professionals because, with the ageing population increasing, this is where the majority of dental care will be in the future," she says.

Prof Slack-Smith would like to see a WA dental aged care system where patients have quality [dental care](#), and relationships developed with their dentist to create continuity.

"Often we miss out in Western Australia because we rely on dental research from overseas and interstate and we have to wait to learn from others."

"Hopefully our body of research, based in Western Australia, will help understand local perspectives and residents in our communities living in aged care will get the benefits sooner'," Prof Slack-Smith says.

More information: Katherine F. Britton et al. Does residential aged care need dental professionals? A qualitative study on dental professionals' perceptions in Australia, *Gerodontology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1111/ger.12209](#)

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