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Promotion of health literacy through targeting educational materials to vulnerable populations

Author (s)

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Background:

This project involved the revision of health education documents for the Bureau of Dental Health at the New York State Department of Health. Oral health has been found to have direct correlations to overall health. Periodontal disease is known to exacerbate cardiac conditions and diabetes, and may also be linked to poor birth outcomes in pregnant women with gum disease. Periodontal diseases can be prevented and/or treated through proper oral hygiene.

Health literacy is a key part of being able to access needed services and gain health-related knowledge. The average functional literacy level in the United States is sixth grade. However, many health documents are written at the tenth grade reading level or greater. The goal of this project was to make information on dental hygiene more accessible to vulnerable populations such as seniors and pregnant women at a variety of reading levels.

Methods:

A needs assessment was conducted to evaluate current educational materials and determine what materials were needed for vulnerable populations. Documents were analyzed using the readability tool in Microsoft Word, and reviewed by Bureau staff. Information was consistent with New York State Oral Health Plan guidelines and American Dental Association recommendations.

Results:

The revised documents were submitted for proofreading and review. This project is still in progress and is being continued by a current intern.