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Child oral health status in rural communities in New Zealand

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Dental caries is a significant problem in New Zealand, with approximately fifty percent of children having experienced dental decay by age five. Dental care under general anaesthesia comprises as leading cause of admission to hospital for young children in a number of District Health Boards (DHBs) in New Zealand. The rate of decay is higher in Maori (indigenous) children compared to other ethnic groups. New Zealand was the first country in the world to introduce the profession of dental nursing (now known as dental therapists) in 1913 to combat the high rate of dental decay in children. The clinics were attached to schools but in more recent times, the School Dental Service focus has evolved to a Community Oral Health Service focus following the implementation of the “Good Oral Health for All, For Life” strategy. Dental care is free from birth until an individual’s eighteenth birthday and this presentation will highlight the successes, challenges and the future of child oral health in New Zealand with an added focus on child oral health status in the more geographical regions such as Tairāwhiti. Access, equity and socioeconomic factors influencing the child’s health and oral health would also form part of the discussion. With more and more focus on early intervention and integrated care, some local and national strategies will be discussed that aid in the betterment of child health and oral health.

Biography

Arish Naresh is the Director of Allied Health and Technical, Tairāwhiti DHB, New Zealand. Graduated from Fiji with honours in Dental Therapy in 2006 and moved to New Zealand to work as a registered dental therapist. Having had a strong public health interest, he then completed his post graduate studies in Leadership and Management and currently manages the dental services for Tairāwhiti District Health located on the East Coast of NZ. Currently he is completing his Masters in Health Science. He is also the Director of Allied Health Services for the hospital and is a board member of NZ Dental and Oral Health Therapist Association. He is passionate about equity, equality and reducing inequalities especially for children and apart from his professional role he is also a board trustee of UNICEF New Zealand. He has been recognised for his contribution to migrant youth services by being recognised in the achievement category of Kiwibank Young New Zealander of the Year 2015.

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