SHOULD UNWELL ADULT HOSPITALISED PATIENTS BE ENCOURAGED TO PERFORM TWICE DAILY ORAL HYGIENE?

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Background
Poor oral hygiene has a considerable impact on a patient’s well-being as well as their quality of life. Oral hygiene affects a patient’s ability to communicate, consume dietary requirements, oral comfort and self-esteem. Outside of the critical care environment oral care is a basic nursing activity that is often seen as the responsibility of the patient. We reviewed literature on adult oral care in hospitals to determine if oral hygiene is necessary for the unwell hospitalised adult, and the nurses’ role in providing oral care needs.

Method
Databases sourced were EBSCO, CINAHL, Dentistry and Oral Sciences Source and Medline. Publications were limited to January 2000 to April 2015. Studies on children, adolescents and critical care environments were excluded. 601 articles were found and 10 were included in the literature review.

Results
A majority of patients who present to hospital do so with unsatisfactory oral hygiene. A patient’s oral health status while hospitalised places them at risk of developing oral infections which, in turn, may systemic circulation, potentially leading to lung and heart infections, contributing to longer admissions.

Conclusion
Oral hygiene deteriorates during hospital admissions. Therefore, a majority of patients require oral care during their admission. Encouraging and assisting patients with their oral hygiene improves quality of life and reduces the risk of infection from oral bacteria. The nurses’ role in providing encouragement for oral hygiene and oral care assistance in general ward nursing requires further investigation.