**Mouth Care Matters goes National!**

**- Mili Doshi (Consultant in Adult Special Care Dentistry & Oral Health Project Lead)**

Three years ago I was asked by Health Education England Kent, Surrey and Sussex to develop a training programme to improve the oral health of hospitalised patients. Until that point I has not really given much thought to whether nursing assistants had any training in how to support patients with mouth care, what happened if a patient did not have a tooth brush on the wards and how many dentures were lost in hospital each year. We started to look at mouth care practice on the wards. We spoke to staff and patients, audited mouth care recording, observed practice and found that this was an area of care that needed to improve because mouth care really does matter!   A lack of mouth care and poor oral health can cause pain and discomfort, lead to difficulties eating and drinking, infections including aspiration pneumonia and increased length of hospital stay. Polypharmacy and many conditions can cause mouth ulcers, oral thrush and dry mouth, which can be debilitating for people who are already in poor health.

A Mouth Care Lead was recruited to provide hands on ward based training and class room training to upskill all staff and also support staff and patients with specific mouth care related problems.

Mouth Care Matters focusses on four core principles:

Knowledge – provide staff/carers with knowledge of why mouth care is so important

Skills – ensure staff/carers are skilled to provide good mouth care

Access – patients/people have access to effective mouth care products

Support – staff/carers/patients have support from staff with enhanced oral health skills

Following a successful pilot at East Surrey Hospital, we rolled out the initiative to 12 trusts in Surrey, Sussex and Kent in 2016/2017. Each trust was funded to recruit a mouth care lead for 12 months responsible for implementing and leading the initiative. Mouth Care Leads were responsible for establishing a mouth care network within their trusts, proving hands on training to all health care professions, ensuring that the wards had a stock of appropriate mouth care products and that there was a pathway for advice if patients developed or had problems with their oral health. A health economics report conducted by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Academic Health Science Network found the return on investment of the Mouth Care Matters programme was £2.66 of benefit within the health care system for every £1 invested in the project.  A further £17 is identified in social benefits for every £1 invested.

There has been lots of interest from trusts nationally in the Mouth Care Matters programmes. Most of this interest is from staff on the wards who recognise the importance of improving mouth care.  We are delighted to currently be working with 29 trusts all over the country to provide a two-day train the trainers programme.

We are also working with Great Ormond Street Hospital to develop ‘Mini Mouth Care Matters for paediatric patients.

The Mouth Care Matters intervention is simple to deliver and includes training, provision of educational resources and signposting to existing resources collated within an existing website http://www.mouthcarematters.hee.nhs.uk.

Three years on we are delighted with what the Mouth Care Matters has achieved to date. We are very grateful for the support and encouragement from Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust that has helped champion this project and has truly made a difference in the care we provide to our patients.

For more information, please visit the following:

<http://www.mouthcarematters.hee.nhs.uk/>

<http://www.mouthcarematters.hee.nhs.uk/cost-benefit-analysis-report/>