

## EFFECTIVENESS INTO PRACTICE

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The almost exponential increase in the amount of information from research that is available to health professionals relating to new treatments, therapies and our understanding of disease processes is creating enormous problems for practitioners and policy makers alike. A new initiative being developed in Wales seeks to provide these two groups with straightforward statements about health which have clearly referenced evidence that has been critically appraised and subjected to a formal literature search across a wide range of sources. Oral health was identified as a key area for inclusion in the project and an oral health bulletin has been produced under the direction of Dr A.L. Glenn, a consultant in dental public health.

In 1995, it was estimated that a general physician needed to examine 19 articles a day, 365 days a year, in order to extract the information required to keep up-to-date in his or her speciality. There is no reason to believe this situation is any different in 1999 and, in fact, with the much greater emphasis on electronic communication, it may be worse. This type of information overload has implications not only for an individual's professional requirement to maintain acceptable standards of care and expertise, but also for the bodies responsible for setting and monitoring the professional standards and competencies of practitioners. In addition, it creates real problems for those trying to develop and implement policy: does the new treatment X offer any advantages over current practice; should a change in practice be supported, and when is it likely to be superseded?

Therefore, it was felt to be essential that clinicians and policy makers have easy access to clear and succinct

statements about health issues that were backed up by references that were up-to-date, indicated the strength of the evidence, had been rigorously and critically appraised and had been subjected to a formal literature search. The Health Evidence Bulletins, born from the work of the original Welsh Health Planning Forum, seeks to provide such a source of information, both in paper format and in electronic format through the World Wide Web. The layout of the bulletins was designed for easy reading and searching, and the hypertext links built into the electronic version enable many of the references cited to be accessed directly on screen.

Eight subject areas were chosen for the Health Evidence Bulletin relating to oral health:

- tooth decay
- periodontal diseases
- dentofacial anomalies
- oral cancer
- TM joint disorders and complex facial pain
- tooth wear and hypersensitivity
- dental injuries
- inherited dental anomalies.

The papers produced by a systematic literature search were first appraised by a clinical team, and then their products were scrutinized by external reviewers in an effort to both minimise bias and ensure that the final product was as robust as possible. The production of this current bulletin is seen only as a first stage. It is intended that the process will be repeated, incorporating new evidence as it becomes available and expanding the range of topics covered.

The *Oral Health* bulletin can be accessed through the Internet at [www.hebw.uwcm.ac.uk](http://www.hebw.uwcm.ac.uk), where paper copies may also be ordered. Nicholas Phin can be contacted by email at [weightmana@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:weightmana@cardiff.ac.uk). ☒

## ORAL HEALTH: WELSH HEALTH EVIDENCE BULLETIN

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*Oral Health* is one in a series of 12 publications initiated by the Protocol Enhancement Project, Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care. The aim of the Health Evidence Bulletins—Wales is to provide 'the best current evidence across a broad range of evidence types and subject areas'.

The Protocol Enhancement Project for the *Oral Health* health evidence bulletin was developed and edited by both an internal oral health review group (namely, academic and public health expertise drawn from Wales) and an external advisory group drawn from prestigious dental academic institutions of the United Kingdom.

The randomised controlled trial (RCT) has been the 'gold standard' for evidence-based health research, and the bulletins include RCTs where available, but also sift through 'high quality evidence' from observational and