

# A Community Partnership as a vehicle to increase access to oral care for geriatrics

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## Why was the idea necessary?

South Africa (SA) has the highest proportion of elderly people in the African region.<sup>[1]</sup> These populations are often underserved, vulnerable and marginalised, particularly in poor communities where they also face challenges of access to appropriate care.<sup>[1]</sup> Of these elderly people, many are partially dentate or edentulous, which significantly impacts their quality of life resulting in functional limitation, pain and disability.<sup>[2]</sup> Community-based organisations (CBO) in disadvantaged communities in SA strive to fill this void, by providing wellness initiatives to enhance their quality of life. Partnering of a dental academic institution with CBOs may create an anchor for oral health services.

The aim of this paper was to document a partnership between a CBO and an academic institution to embed oral health care into the wellness programme of one of their elder clubs as a pilot project.

## What was tried /approach?

Partnering with a CBO with well-developed organisational structure and infrastructure which includes an oral health care professional, provided a platform that facilitated the project. Dental care is often provided in silos that are discipline-specific, resulting in frustration for both patients and professionals. This motivates a need for an interprofessional approach in both teaching and service provision that is cognisant of its context. Interprofessional education (IPE) occurs when members or students of two or more professions

learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care and services.<sup>[3]</sup> -

For this initiative, a mobile dental clinic was used to provide oral health education and clinical treatment that included construction of dentures for selected elderly patients. The oral health team included oral hygiene and dental students, dental technicians, oral hygienists, dental assistants and a dentist. In addition, an on-site innovative mini-laboratory was set up, for the construction of dentures where dental technicians provided support to shorten the denture construction process.

## Lesson learnt

The partnership between the academic institution and CBO was mutually beneficial. The initiative positively impacted on the elderly through improved access to dental care and enhanced quality of life. This initiative not only provided a potential vehicle for IPE for the academic institution but offered alternate clinical innovation. It also has potential to facilitate integration of the disciplines of dentistry in an authentic community setting.

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3. Masood M, Newton T, Bakri NN, Khalid T, Masood Y. The relationship between oral health and oral health related quality of life among elderly people in United Kingdom. *Journal Dentist* 2017; 56:78-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdent.2016.11.002>

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