Regional plan for improving children’s oral health in Andalusia: Dental sealant knowledge, opinion, values and practice of Spanish dentists.

Dental caries is among the most common of preventable childhood infections [1], and methods are currently available to cost effectively reduce caries [2]. The most effective method to reduce occlusal caries are pit and fissure sealants, and over the last four years more than 11 guidelines and systematic reviews have recommended pit and fissure sealant use for at-risk populations [3-13]. However, studies from U.S. [14-16], Greece [17], Sweden [18], and Scotland [19,20] all indicate that sealants are underutilized.

In Spain, recent surveys indicate a 56% caries prevalence among 15–16 year olds, while only 17% have sealants [21,22]. Other Spanish studies demonstrate that occlusal sealants can reduce both occlusal and smooth surface decay by 87% and 68%, respectively, over a two year period [23]. Over a nine year period sealants can reduce occlusal decay by 65% [24].

Thus there are effective methods for caries prevention, but they are underutilized. The theoretical frame for behavior change is an assessment of knowledge and attitudes affecting practice. However, neither theories of behavior change nor knowledge nor attitudes predict clinical practice [25]. Instead, both indicate that values are better predictors [20,26]. Therefore, we examined knowledge combined with opinions and values, as a first step toward initiating comprehensive caries prevention program in Spain. More particularly we assessed dentists Andalusia regarding to the use of pit and fissure sealants.

The results suggest that, similar to other countries, Andalusian dentists know that sealants are effective, have neutral to positive attitudes toward sealants; though, based on epidemiological studies, underuse sealants. Therefore, methods other than classical behavior change (eg: financial or legal mechanisms) will be required to change practice patterns aimed at improving children’s oral health. This is a prelude to the generation of a regional plan for improving children’s oral health in Andalusia.
School dental examinations. Number of children with/without fissure sealants present.

Continuing education for dentists.
References


