

HARRISBURG, Pa., Oct. 10, 2019 – People over 65 are among the fastest-growing groups of people seeking dental care, a trend that will affect how treatment is delivered and how benefits are administered, according to United Concordia Dental.

During National Dental Hygiene Month, dental professionals should consider what types of approaches are needed to serve this growing number of older patients.

"Caring for older patients is different than treating younger people, and often much more complicated," said Dr. Quinn Dufurrena, D.D.S., J.D., United Concordia's chief dental officer. "The most important difference is that older patients are more likely to be managing chronic medical conditions like heart disease or diabetes."

Numerous studies have shown associations between regular oral care treatments – especially for gum disease – and these chronic conditions. When dentists are treating older patients, they need to be fully aware of their overall health needs, Dufurrena said.

People over 65 frequently encounter dental issues that are less prevalent in younger patients. For example, they are more likely to have darkened teeth, which are caused by staining and the thinning of their enamel layer. They also face a higher risk of gum disease and tooth loss than younger patients. And some medications they take may cause dry mouth, which can impact the health of their teeth and gums.

The number of older Americans seeking dental care has been rising steadily since 2000, according to the Health Policy Institute. Baby Boomers have grown up with fluoridated water, family dentists and regular checkups. Many have been covered by employer-sponsored dental insurance plans during their working years.

According to the American Association of Retired People (AARP), more than 10,000 members of the Baby Boom generation turn 65 every day. There are more than 53 million Americans over 65, and they are paying closer attention to their oral health than previous generations did. As their numbers continue to grow, they will make up a larger percentage of the patients in dental chairs.

"Taking care of your oral health is a crucial part of maintaining your total health, so it's good to see people continuing to visit the dentist after age 65," Dufurrena said. "We need to make sure we're helping them access the quality of dental and medical services they need to remain healthy."

To learn more about the basics of oral hygiene, visit United Concordia's Dental Health Center at [www.UnitedConcordia.com](http://www.UnitedConcordia.com)

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