

A Study to Exploring the Impact of Dry Mouth on People with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

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Abstract

Xerostomia is the subjective sensation of dry mouth and is frequently experienced by people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease due to factors such as adverse drug reactions and mouth-breathing. The aim of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the condition experienced by people with COPD. Eight people with COPD and xerostomia were recruited for a qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were carried out and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The data conveys a dual narrative; participants reported symptoms which could objectively be described as unpleasant, including frequent waking in the night and discomfort with voice and speech. Interestingly, only the most severely affected participants reported difficulties eating, swallowing, or maintaining oral health. Despite these accounts of xerostomia having an impact on multiple aspects of wellbeing, participants rarely sought support from health professionals, all expressed surprise that their dentist could offer support or advice regarding the symptom. The one participant who raised the issue with their general practitioner reported an unsatisfactory outcome. Even the most severely affected expressed resignation, stating that dry mouth was just something they had to learn to live with. This study demonstrated that people with COPD would benefit from information and advice in order to reduce their symptom burden and promote self-management. Further studies regarding the understanding and insight of health professionals regarding dry mouth and xerostomia would also be appropriate. Allied to this is the question of to what extent, and for what reasons, people might not actively seek intervention to remediate their condition.

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