Today’s piece was prepared by Lauren Lawler, MPH, MS-4, from a NY Times story, “For Children with Autism, Opening a Door to Dental Care” <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/20/for-children-with-autism-opening-a-door-to-dental-care/?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share>

This article discusses strategies being utilized by US dentists to facilitate routine dental care for children on the autism spectrum who often face special sensory and attention challenges during dental visits. The article highlights a 2008 review in the Journal of the American Dental Association which found that children with autism spectrum disorders are more likely to be put under general anesthesia due to being uncooperative during dental procedures. This article focuses on identifying resources available for families and dentists to improve the ability of children with autism spectrum disorders to receive preventative dental care such that they can avoid dental disease and the need for restraints or sedation.

While this article primarily describes growing resources for dentists and families, it also implies that very few dentists are willing to treat such patients. For example, the article cites a 2005 study from Critical Issues in Dental Education in describing that 3/5 of a randomly selected group of 208 dentists in Michigan State said that they would not treat children on the autism spectrum. What the article failed to relay about this study was that the overall intention of the study was to investigate whether undergraduate dental education regarding special needs patients affects the professional behavior, practice characteristics, and attitudes toward special needs patients. What’s more, the study *did* find that the better educated dental professionals reported being about special needs patients the more likely they were to treat special needs patients, to have set up their practices to treat special needs patients, and to enjoy treating special needs patients. Where there is room for improvement, it seems, is in that the majority of dental professionals reported that their undergraduate dental education did not prepare them well for this work.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES & PROVIDERS – DENTAL CARE & AUTISM:

--Autism Speaks toolkit for dental professionals and families: <http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/dental#sthash.3xD6oWfZ>

--UW School of Dentistry: patients with special needs

<http://dental.washington.edu/departments/omed/decod/special_needs_facts.php/>

--UW Center for Pediatric Dentistry: http://thecenterforpediatricdentistry.com/

--Article by UW’s Dr. Travis Nelson on this topic: https://www.parentmap.com/article/for-kids-with-special-needs-going-to-the-dentist-doesnt-have-to-be-scary

--Autism Speaks state-by-state dentals directory: <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-guide#sthash.A5pySLqO>

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!