

“The Barwon Health Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Physiotherapy Clinic - advanced practice physiotherapy in the Department of Oral Health. A pilot project.”

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Background:

Prior to the implementation of the TMJ Physiotherapy Clinic model, clients referred for treatment of orofacial pain at Barwon Health were seen in an ad-hoc fashion without a systematic approach to referral, screening, assessment, and management. Treatment approaches and wait times varied and were dependant on first practitioner seen. Clients were predominately referred to Dental for splinting, with high initial and ongoing costs, or to Maxillofacial Surgery (MFS). Allied health and interdisciplinary communication and approaches to management were minimal. Physiotherapy involvement was limited to one physiotherapist with specific training and experience in this field.

Methods:

The Physiotherapy and Oral Health Departments collaborated to trial an 8 hours/week advanced practice physiotherapy clinic for 12 months. A physiotherapist with extensive experience in the treatment of TMJ disorders was appointed as project lead. Clinical guidelines and screening tools were sourced and implemented. A standardized physiotherapy electronic medical record assessment tool was developed and successfully trialled. Training material was developed and delivered to key staff, including one physiotherapist at each community health centre (CHC) to receive on-referrals. Data collected included referral and attendance numbers, diagnoses, age, gender, outcome, and client satisfaction with the service.

Results:

Ninety referrals were received with 66 attendees. Of these, 18 required follow up with dental or MFS, with only 4 proceeding to splinting. The remainder were managed in the clinic or via on-referral to appropriate practitioners, including CHC physiotherapists. A high degree of consumer satisfaction was reported with reference to reduced waiting times, appropriate care, organized transition to other services, reduced pain, improved knowledge and self- management , and improved function. Referral pathways and links between dental and allied health disciplines were established and strengthened.

Discussion:

All project goals were achieved with significant cost savings to the Oral Health Department. The clinic was permanently funded in January 2015.