



Niamh Coffey<sup>1</sup>, O' Leary, F.<sup>1</sup>, Plant, B.<sup>2</sup>, Burke, F.M.<sup>1</sup>, Roberts, A.<sup>1</sup>, Hayes, M.<sup>3</sup>

## Affiliations

<sup>1</sup> Department of Restorative Dentistry, Cork University Dental School and Hospital, Ireland, <sup>2</sup> Adult Cystic Fibrosis Unit, Cork University Hospital, Ireland, <sup>3</sup> Department of Restorative Dentistry, Dublin Dental University Hospital, Ireland

## Introduction

- Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is an autosomal recessive genetic condition, characterised by thick mucus secretions in multiple organ systems.
- Manifestations include recurrent respiratory infections, diabetes, osteoporosis, GI complications, liver and kidney disease.
- Life expectancy of People with CF (PWCF) has increased from 11 years in 1978 to mid-50s in 2019.
- Studies show that people with special medical care needs may be less likely to access dental care<sup>1</sup> and a recent report showed that PWCF attend the dentist less frequently than is recommended<sup>2</sup>.

## Objectives

To carry out a cross sectional qualitative study to investigate the attitudes of adults with CF towards dental attendance and any perceived barriers to dental treatment.

## Methodology

A structured, anonymous questionnaire was used to obtain information regarding the feelings of adults with CF towards accessing and receiving dental treatment.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Cork Teaching Hospitals (ECM 03/2022 PUB).

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) was employed by collaboration with patient advocates from Cystic Fibrosis Ireland.

Questionnaire piloted on three individuals.

Inclusion criteria: aged  $\geq 18$  years, with a diagnosis of CF.

Participants recruited via CF Ireland's mailing list and social media channels (n=approximately 500)

Responses underwent descriptive statistical analysis (SPSS v 28.0) and inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## Results

**71** respondents (33 male: 38 female)

**54.9% (n=39)** were unhappy with their teeth

**63.4% (n=45)** felt CF had an impact on their oral health.

Main reasons given were medications, dietary requirements, tiredness, other effects of CF (e.g. missed appts due to being unwell)

**33.8% (n=24)** were anxious about attending dentist.

Main reasons given were cross infection concerns, issues with the dentist (such as dentist scolding them), tolerating dental treatment due to PWCF need to cough frequently), and with teeth themselves

PWCF want dentists to be aware of oral impact of medication, treatment, diet, and practicalities of dental treatment- especially discomfort lying back

Fig. 1 (opposite) gives a visual representation of PWCF's concerns re: dental treatment.

CF related concerns (medications, dietary requirements, tiredness) are shown at the top, and dentist-related concerns (lying back, dentist scolding, cross infection concerns) are shown at the bottom



Fig. 1

## Conclusions

Over one third of adults with CF report anxiety about attending the dentist.

Reasons for this include fear, embarrassment, cross infection concerns and problems with treatment, especially being in the supine position.

Adults with CF want dentists to be aware of the impact that CF can have upon dental treatment and oral health care.

## Recommendations

- Sit patient upright if possible, and give breaks as needed.
- Carry out a thorough medical and social history; Diabetes, Inhalers, Oral Nutritional Supplements are common.
- Be aware that PWCF may be on long term medications and dietary regime that can damage their teeth- do not chastise patients as this may make them more reluctant to attend.
- Reassure PWCF that all cross infection control standards are being met.