



**ombudsman**

Public Defender of Rights

## **Dental care for people with mental disabilities and an autism spectrum disorder**

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**Ombudsman's Research and Recommendation 2018**

**Summary in English**



Medical condition in combination with other factors undoubtedly affects satisfaction, well-being and quality of life of people. Dental care is a major area of general healthcare, although many people do not appreciate it enough.



**DID YOU KNOW THAT...**

...according to literature, people with mental disorders are more likely to experience oral health problems than others?

The complaints that we received and the experience of NGOs and dentists indicate that **people with mental disabilities and an autism spectrum disorder** often face a number of distinctive problems in the area of dental care. These people or their close ones often **mentioned the following issues:**

- inappropriate communication on the part of the medical professionals;
- shortcomings in providing information on the interventions being performed;
- refusing to provide care completely, which can lead to discrimination.

**The physicians** we consulted **noted that:**

- medical professionals are often unsure about how to communicate with disabled persons correctly;
- they do not receive adequate remuneration for the extra work with disabled patients.

**We decided to study this area in more detail.** After discussing what to focus on, we chose to look closer at the practice of providing **conservation dental care under general anaesthesia.**

**CONSERVATION DENTAL CARE**

means dental treatment, especially of cavities (removal of cavities, placement of fillings, removal of decayed teeth etc.).

Some people with mental disorders and an autism spectrum disorder are unable to sufficiently co-operate with the dentist during an examination in an ordinary dentist's surgery and they require examination under general anaesthesia. Our preliminary findings suggested that the waiting times for such interventions were disproportionately long.

**The research** involving 17 workplaces providing conservation dental care under general anaesthesia especially **revealed the following:**

- Such workplaces are not evenly distributed. There are several such workplaces in some regions while others have none.
- In 2015-2017, the average waiting time for these interventions was approximately 4 months for adult patients. Children's waiting time was 12 days longer on average.
- Almost 50 % of workplaces do not consider "their" waiting times acceptable from the medical point of view.
- The reason for treatment of adult patients under general anaesthesia lay mainly in the impossibility of providing care in an ordinary dentist's surgery due to their mental disability or autism spectrum disorder (57 %); regarding child patients, the majority (50 %) were "non-cooperating" patients without particular health problems (e.g. children who are too afraid to go to a dentist, often because parents do not take them for regular examinations and the children are not accustomed to the environment).
- The conditions that a patient must meet to qualify for general anaesthesia differ among the workplaces – there are no uniformly applied criteria. Moreover, treatment is provided chaotically across workplaces with different specialisations; many workplaces only perform such interventions in addition to their main purpose.
- Workplaces are not proceeding uniformly as concerns the matter of reimbursements for care.

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**DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE GOOD DENTAL CARE CORRESPONDING TO THEIR NEEDS.**

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Based on the research findings, we prepared a **set of recommendations** which we believe could help people with mental disorders and an autism spectrum disorder to gain access to good dental care.

Recommendations are addressed to the Ministry of Health, the Czech Dental Chamber, health insurance companies, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, non-profit organisations, professional associations, higher education institutions, workplaces providing treatment under general anaesthesia.

#### **The key measures include:**

- defining a network of workplaces with sufficient capacity specialising in conservation dental care under general anaesthesia;
- defining diagnostic criteria for providing conservation dental care under general anaesthesia and creating a set of recommended procedures for care of patients in the in-patient sector with the aim of reducing the number of interventions under general anaesthesia;
- clarifying the terms of reimbursement for conservation dental care under general anaesthesia from public health insurance.

**Do you want to know more about our research and recommendations?**

The complete research report is available in Czech at:  
<https://www.ochrance.cz/diskriminace/vyzkum/>