

Commentary

Oral myofunctional therapy in Argentina

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Oral Myofunctional Therapy in Argentina

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The practice of oral myofunctional therapy in Argentina is part of speech pathology. Currently, few speech pathologists have received training in myofunctional therapy. Those that include myofunctional treatment in their practices are mostly in private practice. To my knowledge, little, if any, myofunctional therapy is practiced in the school setting.

My own practice of speech pathology and oral myofunctional therapy includes a private practice as well as work in a dental school. The dental school work in speech pathology and oral myofunctional disorders includes evaluation, treatment, research and teaching of dental students and graduate students in orthodontics and pediatric dentistry.

Training in Oral Myofunctional Therapy

Most speech clinicians in Argentina who include myofunctional therapy in their practices have either attended courses at the Garliner Institute for Myofunctional Therapy in Coral Gables, Florida, or have spent time with a trained therapist in several all-day private courses. My training, for example, involved four Garliner courses prior to the recent convention of the International Association of Orofacial Myology in Orlando, Florida, June, 1993. I have been active in presenting lectures and courses in various dental and speech pathology congresses in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil as well as providing courses in my private office. Speech pathologists also visit occasionally at the dental school to observe the six of us in speech pathology who provide diagnostic and treatment services.

The Oral Myofunctional Disorders Team

The team approach is used in the dental school setting for oral myofunctional disorders. Team members include the speech pathologist, orthodontist, pediatric dentist, pediatrician, ear nose and throat physician and a psychologist. Problems such as mouth breathing have required team management for adequate diagnosis and treatment planning. Although surgery is required in some patients (such as removal of adenoids which can block the posterior entrance into the nose), the team is conservative about recommending surgery. Allergic rhinitis is a frequent diagnosis and such conditions are treated with medications.

Our team is also active with patients who have sleep apnea. Polysomnographic (sleep) studies are routinely done for such patients as part of the diagnostic workup. Currently, there is an appreciation among the team members for carefully documenting the various physical

conditions that can lead to mouthbreathing. The team concept has provided an excellent model for interdisciplinary communication and, hopefully, improved patient care. The psychologist on the team is referred some patients with oral habits that appear to be psychologically based. In addition, the psychologist consults about other aspects of treatment and participates in the research projects.

Currently, the team is involved with a research project involving 7 to 9 year olds with oral myofunctional disorders. We are documenting the effects of oral myofunctional therapy, with and without the simultaneous use of removable orthodontic (functional) appliances, contrasted with appliance therapy alone. Hopefully, the information obtained by comparing three treatment protocols will provide useful perspectives about the role of oral myofunctional therapy with a variety of problems.

Dental Student Training

At the University of Buenos Aires Dental School, all dental students receive lectures from the staff speech pathologists about normal and disordered speech and oral myofunctional conditions and problems. Part of their dental school training includes a practice component. By graduation, each dental student has had experience in screening for speech and oral myofunctional disorders. Graduate students in orthodontics and pediatric dentistry also receive lectures and clinical experience from the dental school speech pathologists. Emphasis is placed on the team approach to diagnosis and treatment.

Interest in Oral Myofunctional Disorders

As in the United States, speech pathologists in Argentina are becoming more interested in oral myofunctional problems. Many are seeking out training in various courses provided in Argentina by other therapists who have received training. In the future, it is hoped that more speech pathologists who practice oral myofunctional therapy will affiliate with the International Association of Orofacial Myology (IAOM) as a means of keeping current, improving clinical skills and contributing the knowledge base that is expanding rapidly within the IAOM.

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