

## Geriatric Dentistry

**Elena Jones**

IDC, USA

Geriatric dentistry is concerned with the oral health of elderly persons, who usually have significant medical problems and are taking multiple medications. In addition, they may have psychological and socioeconomic problems that require sophisticated dental management. A basic premise of geriatric dentistry is that elderly people often experience symptoms of dental decay and gingival (gum) disorders that differ from symptoms experienced by younger people. Dental treatment for the elderly is therefore geared to any physical and mental limitations they may have.

Poor oral health in the elderly can lead to loss of appetite, malnutrition, metabolic disorders, and even, in cases of facial disfigurement, the onset of depression. Periodontal disease has been linked to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other illnesses. With the number of elderly persons of advanced age (85 years or older) with mental disorders such as Alzheimer disease reaching epidemic proportions, dental management of affected individuals has become a major challenge in clinical dental practice. The elderly often take many medications, which have adverse side effects such as dry mouth, a major cause of dental decay. The effects of aging result in changes in lip posture, chewing efficiency, and ability to swallow and taste and in an increase in diseases of the hard and soft tissues of the mouth.

Although the majority of the elderly retain their natural teeth, dental decay, periodontal disease, and loss of teeth in individuals over the age of 65 have reached significant proportions. This backlog of oral disorders demands education, research, and advanced clinical training in geriatric dentistry.