

# The Role of Nurses in Oral Health Care in Albania: Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

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**Received:** 📅 2025 Apr 01

**Accepted:** 📅 2025 Apr 20

**Published:** 📅 2025 Apr 30

## Abstract

*Oral health is an integral component of overall health, yet it is often neglected within health systems worldwide, including Albania. Nurses can play a key role in improving oral health outcomes by providing patient education, early disease identification, and preventive care. This paper examines the current status of oral health in Albania, challenges faced by the healthcare system, and the potential role of nurses in improving oral health care in the country. Through a review of recent studies, it highlights opportunities for integrating oral health into primary healthcare services and provides recommendations for future improvements.*

**Keywords:** Oral Health, Nurses, Patient Education, Albania, Oral Disease Prevention, Multidisciplinary Approach.

## 1. Introduction

Oral health is a significant aspect of overall health, yet in many countries, including Albania, oral health care often remains overlooked. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized the need for integrating oral health into general healthcare due to its impact on general well-being and quality of life [1]. Oral diseases, including dental caries and periodontal disease, are highly prevalent in Albania and are a leading cause of morbidity among both children and adults [2].

Nurses, particularly those working in primary care settings, are ideally placed to contribute to oral health promotion and disease prevention. While Albania has made strides in improving access to dental care in urban areas, rural communities still face significant challenges in accessing professional dental services [3]. Given these challenges, nurses can provide essential support in educating patients about oral hygiene practices and refer them to dental professionals for further care when needed.



### 1.1. Oral Health in Albania

Oral health issues are widespread in Albania, with studies showing that approximately 60% of children and 40% of adolescents suffer from dental caries [2]. Although there have been improvements in the accessibility of dental services in major cities, rural regions continue to experience limited access to quality dental care. The prevalence of periodontal diseases, especially gingivitis, remains high due to factors such as poor diet, limited oral hygiene education, and lack of access to dental professionals [4].

In addition, the economic challenges faced by many Albanian families contribute to poor oral health, as dental care remains expensive for some sectors of the population. The Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection has recognized these challenges and is working towards improving public health policies, but significant gaps still exist [5]. It is within this context that nurses can play a critical role in addressing the oral health needs of the population.

## 1.2. Role of Nurses in Oral Health Care

Nurses can make substantial contributions to improving oral health in Albania through the following approaches

## 1.3. Patient Education and Health Promotion

Nurses are often the first point of contact in healthcare settings and can provide essential education on oral hygiene. According to recent studies, nurses can promote basic oral health practices such as proper brushing and flossing techniques, which are fundamental in preventing oral diseases [6,7]. By incorporating oral health education into routine health assessments, nurses can raise awareness and empower patients to take responsibility for their oral health.

## 1.4. Early Detection and Referral

Nurses can play a key role in the early detection of oral health problems. For example, nurses in primary care settings can assess patients for common oral diseases such as gingivitis, cavities, or signs of oral cancer during routine physical examinations. Early identification of these issues enables nurses to make timely referrals to dental specialists for more advanced care [4,8].

## 1.5. Integration into National Health Programs

In Albania, the Ministry of Health has implemented various health promotion programs. However, these programs often lack an explicit focus on oral health. Nurses can be pivotal in integrating oral health education into national health campaigns and ensuring that the public receives information on preventing dental diseases from an early age. Nurses can partner with dentists to conduct workshops and outreach programs in schools and communities to promote healthy oral practices [3,9].

## 1.6. Collaboration with Dental Professionals

A multidisciplinary approach to healthcare is essential for improving oral health. Nurses should collaborate with dentists and other healthcare providers to create holistic care plans for patients. According to recent findings, a strong partnership between nurses and dental professionals can lead to better patient outcomes, as it ensures that oral health is addressed alongside other medical needs [1,10]. Nurses can help coordinate care by ensuring that oral health is included in routine health assessments, even in settings where dental care might not be directly available.

## 1.7. Challenges in Oral Health Care Integration

Despite the potential for nurses to contribute significantly to oral health, there are several barriers that need to be addressed.

- **Lack of Training:** Nurses in Albania often do not receive formal training in oral health during their education, which limits their ability to identify and manage oral health problems effectively. According to incorporating oral health into nursing curricula could help bridge this gap and improve nurses' ability to manage oral health issues in primary care settings [6].
- **Limited Resources:** Many healthcare facilities, especially in rural areas, lack the necessary tools and resources for oral health assessments and interventions. This lack

of resources limits the ability of nurses to perform even basic oral health evaluations [3,11].

- **Lack of Awareness:** There is still limited public awareness of the importance of oral health in Albania. Nurses often face challenges in educating patients who are not aware of the consequences of neglecting their oral health [4].

## • Opportunities for Improvement

Several strategies can be employed to improve the integration of oral health care in Albania, particularly in the role of nurses

## • Training and Education for Nurses

To enhance the role of nurses in promoting oral health, it is crucial to integrate oral health education into nursing programs. Providing nurses with the skills to perform basic oral health assessments and offering them continuing education opportunities in this area could lead to better health outcomes [6,7].

## • Governmental and Community Support

The government and healthcare organizations should collaborate to provide more resources for oral health care, especially in rural areas. Nurses can be empowered through public health policies that encourage them to play an active role in promoting oral health in their communities [2,9].

## • Public Awareness Campaigns

Collaboration between healthcare professionals and public health organizations to launch national campaigns aimed at increasing awareness about the importance of oral hygiene would be beneficial. Nurses can serve as ambassadors for these campaigns, helping to disseminate information on preventive practices in schools and community centers [3,8].

## 2. Conclusion

Oral health is a critical component of overall health, and nurses in Albania have a significant opportunity to improve public health outcomes by promoting oral health, educating patients, and supporting early detection and prevention. While challenges remain, especially in rural areas, addressing these barriers through better training for nurses, more resources, and public health initiatives could lead to significant improvements in oral health care. By integrating oral health into general healthcare practices, Albania can take significant steps toward improving the overall health and well-being of its population.

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