



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

F O U N D A T I O N

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Oral Trauma in Infant Victims of Abusive Head Trauma (G0901)

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Abstract

Oro-pharyngeal injuries are commonly described in child victims of physical abuse. Several case series of abused children examined by dentists have described the type of oral injuries most commonly seen among both inpatient and outpatient cases. Certain oro-pharyngeal injuries, particularly laceration of the labial frenulum, have been described as pathognomonic of child abuse, at least among children not yet weight bearing. Understanding the specificity and positive predictive value of this and other oro-pharyngeal injuries is critical for primary care physicians seeing children with these seemingly trivial injuries. Characteristics of bruises commonly associated with abuse have been well described. It is now clear that children not weight bearing should never present with a bruise, and that such a child deserves careful evaluation for abuse and coagulopathy. However, empiric evidence regarding the appropriate response to a child with oro-pharyngeal injuries is lacking. The proposed project will leverage an existing prospective study of young children admitted to intensive care units or with fatal head injuries in our state, which is part of an evaluation of an abusive head trauma prevention program. Each infant under seven months admitted to our medical center's intensive care unit with abusive head trauma or non-intentional head trauma or with a fatal head injury examined in our medical examiner's office will receive a comprehensive dental exam by a pediatric dentist. This prospective cohort study of infants with serious head injuries allows a nearly perfect comparison group to better understand the association between oro-pharyngeal injuries and abuse. If this study supports our hypothesis, it will provide critical information to family physicians seeing infants with this seemingly mild injury.