The Dental Therapist Project: Expanding Care to Every Community

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Community Catalyst

Community Catalyst is a national non-profit advocacy organization that works with national, state and local consumer organizations, policymakers and foundations to build consumer and community leadership to improve the health care system.

We support consumer advocacy networks that impact state and federal health care policy and ensure consumers have a seat at the table as health care decisions are made.
Oral Health is Important to Overall Health

Yet tens of millions of Americans can’t get dental care. They are suffering as a result.

Photo credit: United Press International

Brief History of Dental Therapy

• Model began in the 1920s
• Dental therapists practice in 50+ countries, including the US, Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand and The Netherlands
• First U.S. based dental therapist program began in 2005
• Part of dental teams in Alaska, Minnesota and recently authorized in Vermont and Maine. Demonstrations in Washington and Oregon.
• 2015 Council on Dental Accreditation (CODA) approved national standards
• 2017 Authorized for Tribal Communities in Washington
What did dental therapists mean for Alaska?

- **Healthy Kids:**
  - 45,000 AK Natives with dental health care
  - Cavity free children
  - Increased access and priority for vulnerable children – extending the dentists hands
  - Culturally competent care
  - Meets the Triple Aim: Cost Efficiency, Patient Satisfaction and Quality Care
  - Focus on prevention versus emergency care

- **Family Economic Security:**
  - The DHAT program generates 76 full time jobs per year with a net economic effect of $9.7M (1/3 spent in rural Alaska)
  - Workforce retention in rural communities
  - Diversifying the Oral Health pipeline
  - Higher education access for vulnerable communities (starting at community colleges)
  - Educational career path started

- **Education:**
  - DHATs provide oral health education and onsite services to Head Start and elementary school children

- **Racial Equity and Community Engagement:**
  - Racial Equity and Community Engagement has been at the center

What did dental therapists mean for Minnesota?

- 84% of patients served by dental therapists were enrolled in public health insurance programs
- Dental therapists served 6,338 new patients
- About 1/3 of patients experienced a reduction in wait times, with a more pronounced impact in rural areas
- Some patients saw a reduction in travel time for their appointment with a dental therapist compared to their previous appointment, most notably in rural areas
- Preliminary findings indicated that dental therapists may reduce ER usage by expanding capacity at dental clinics serving the underserved
- Clinics also report
  - Personnel cost savings
  - Lower costs of dental therapists allows clinics to expand capacity to serve more underserved and public program patients
  - Increased dental team productivity
  - Improved patient satisfaction
Evidence Based Solutions

A global literature review of 1,100 documents found that “mid-level” dental practitioners known as dental therapists have a long history of providing safe, effective dental care. In fact none of the 1,100 documents found any evidence of compromises to safety or quality of care.

Economic Viability of Dental Therapists

Dental Therapists Are A Smart Investment

Dental therapists are increasing access to oral health care especially for those who need it most: low-income families, people of color, people living in rural areas, and those on Medicaid.

- **65 million people** live in areas where they can’t get dental care—millions more can’t afford it.
- **58% of children** on Medicaid did not receive any dental care in 2013.

**In Alaska**, dental therapists have been able to expand care to 94,000 people who didn’t have access before, including rural and tribal populations.

**In Wisconsin**, dental therapists have been able to expand access to care to those most in need.

- **78%** of patients were publicly insured.
- **67%** of patients were under 21.

- **84.7%** of the care dental therapists provide is preventive and routine.
### Momentum for Dental Therapists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent with Untreated Decay Among Children 3-5 Years of Age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AI/AN, 2014</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

AI/AN children have 4 times more untreated decay than white children.

### Expanding the Dental Team

- **Tradition Dental Team**
  - Dentist
  - Hygienist
  - Dental Assistant

- **Expanded Dental Team**
  - Dentist
  - Hygienist
  - Dental Therapist
  - Dental Assistant

- **Community Dental Health Coordinator**
  - Community Clinics & Private Practice
  - Mobile Dental Clinics
  - School-Based Health Clinics
Momentum is Growing

Momentum for Dental Therapists

2006

Alaska Native Tribes Authorized Dental Health Aide Therapists
Building Momentum for Dental Therapists

States That Have Authorized Dental Therapists

- WASH.
- OREG.
- CALIF.
- NEV.
- IDAHO
- MONT.
- WYO.
- UTAH
- COLO.
- N.D.
- S.D.
- NEB.
- KAN.
- ARIZ.
- N.M.
- TEXAS
- OKLA.
- MINN.
- IOWA
- MO.
- ARK.
- LA.
- MISS.
- ALA.
- TENN.
- KY.
- ILL.
- WIS.
- MICH.
- IND.
- OHIO
- N.C.
- S.C.
- GA.
- FLA.
- VA.
- W.VA.
- PA.
- N.Y.
- D.C.
- MD.
- DEL.
- N.J.
- CONN.
- R.I.
- MASS.
- VT.
- N.H.
- MAINE
- HAWAII
- ALASKA

Tribal Nations Using Dental Therapists Through Sovereign Rights

- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Coquille Indian Tribes

States That Have Shown Interest in Dental Therapists

- *over 28 tribal resolutions in support of Dental Therapists*

Tribes That Have Authorized Dental Therapists

- Coquille Indian Tribes

Tribes That Have State Pilot Approval

- 2017

Diverse Coalitions in Support of Oral Health

Diverse, unique & unlikely allies

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In a new survey, 45 percent of U.S. voters said they go without needed dental care because of cost or lack of insurance. But eight out of 10 respondents said they favor a way to mitigate this problem: adding midlevel dental providers, such as dental therapists, to dental care teams.

Transferable Lessons
Dental Therapists are Working

2017 Sample Curriculum

A Sample Dental Therapy Curriculum for Community Colleges

Developed by Community Catalyst
Thank You

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https://vimeo.com/200717331