



Executive Summary: Dental Van Shenanigans

According to the Surgeon General's 2000 report, *Oral Health in America*, is referred to as a "silent epidemic" of oral diseases. Our nation focuses on overall health and not healthcare. However, the definition of total healthcare differs in the political system from the reality. Oral disease can have an impact on physical, psychological, social, and economic health and well-being through pain, diminished function, and reduced quality of life.

Legal immigrants are barred for five years from receiving public healthcare, such as MEDICAID, CHIP or the Affordable Care Act, if they came to the United States before Aug. 22, 1996. Immigrant adults and children have a higher likelihood of poor oral care compared to US citizens. According to ADA,, immigrants including naturalized citizens and undocumented individuals are likely to have one dental visit per year compared to US-born citizens. With health program restrictions and factors, such as inadequate understanding of the health care system, language barriers and concerns about immigration enforcement, many will depend on low cost clinics, such as dental vans to receive the care needed to maintain their overall health.

Barriers

Dental care is not integrated into primary healthcare or behavioral healthcare services and thus many US citizens has poor oral health. Oftentimes, immigrants depend on their Visas to remain in the United States, however, this does not guarantee access to healthcare insurance. Immigrants may be hesitant to apply for insurance due to fears of losing their Visa, cost of insurance, unemployment, unaware of benefits available, misguidance, language barrier, articulation, and transportation.

Public health professionals and dental hygienists also face social and economic barriers. One of the greatest barriers is lack of dental service in United States. Oral health literacy, health disparities, lack of funding, transparency in the dental field, unethical practices and poor cooperation of the state and health department are the barriers which need to be overcome in order to serve the community with quality health care.

Role & Coordination of Health Care Professionals

As healthcare professionals, it is our responsibility to maintain an ethical theory known as Utilitarianism; the goal is to promote happiness and reduce suffering. Healthcare professionals aid to overcome the inadequate support of the dental van by donating their time to public health clinics, so that underserved populations, such as immigrants can receive adequate care. To overcome the inadequate support of the dental van, we can provide information to the affected community of other ways to get low-cost dental care. Dental schools or dental hygiene schools with clinics can utilize the students as their resources to provide primary dental care at a reduced cost to the community under supervision. In the case of more severe cases participating in a clinical trial can provide them free or low-cost treatment for some time.

Public health professionals play an equal role in serving the community and reducing any disparities within the community. Proper funding and policies need to be put in place to minimize the health disparities and help dental hygienists to deliver the proper care. Public health personnel can help plan and create an intervention, setting goals and objectives, developing and implementing the interventions, and evaluating results for a better outcome. The public health department or officer can help communicate with the community about the program, distribute education information, and organize the community towards the interventions.

The coordination of dental hygiene and public health strive towards goals and outcomes to improve the entirety of the public's health. The plan of action to achieve this overall aim is through improved health literacy, successful delivery systems, such as a dental mobile van or clinic, and the personnel to meet the specific population's needs.

"increase awareness of the importance of oral health and well-being, increase acceptance and adoption for effective preventive interventions, and reduce disparities in access to effective to preventive and dental treatment services".

~Health People 2020

Plan of Action

- ⇒ Assess the population being served.
- ⇒ Determine the resources and funding needed.
- ⇒ Obtain appropriate resources, funding and staff.
- ⇒ Appropriately train staff.
- ⇒ Establish relationship with community partners.
- ⇒ Integrate oral health and primary health care.
- ⇒ Prevent disease and promote oral health.
- ⇒ Increase access to oral health care and eliminate disparities.
- ⇒ Increase the dissemination of oral health information and improve health literacy.
- ⇒ Advance oral health in public policy and research.

Conclusion

As healthcare providers it is our duty to provide healthcare services to the underserved populations. Since it has come to our attention and been made aware that immigrants are not being provided proper dental care services due to social and environmental factors. We have come to a solution with the community van to reach this population. We want to meet the needs of those underserved, but we can only do so with a collaborative participation between dental and public health services.

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