

Focus on Oral Health

An Oral Health Home for All Floridians

By Henrie M. Treadwell, Ph.D., Guest Writer

Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, issued in 2000, named oral health disparities as the "silent epidemic." In a 2014 progress update, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stated that oral health has not shown improvement and is getting worse. Fifteen years after the Surgeon General report, despite advances in the field of oral health over the past 50 years, disparities persist and the reasons for the lack of progress must be examined to find the way forward that can lead to an oral health home for all.



Since 2010, according to a report by the University of Florida, the state of Florida has received poor ratings on multiple oral health indicators for children, including an "F" for meeting policy benchmarks to ensure dental health and access for disadvantaged children. Roughly 76% of Florida's Medicaid enrolled children did not receive dental care in 2011, placing Florida as the lowest ranking state in the country. The Florida Institute for Health Innovation (formerly known as Florida Public Health Institute) reports that children and adults in Florida, including the elderly, do not receive preventive care due to not having sufficient dental coverage (uninsured or underinsured), the cost of care, a lack of dentists accepting Medicaid patients, limited health department resources, and too little recognition by the general public of the importance of oral health. Other issues include the lack of fluoridated water for 30% of the population, and a lack of pediatric dentists that accept Medicaid patients in 22% (15) of Florida's counties. Five of these counties provide only volunteer services to children. Notably, among adults, the 2008-2012 incidence for cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx was higher than the national rate. Oral cancer is often diagnosed late and is more difficult to cure among those that do not have a regular source of oral health care, typically the poor and communities of color.

According to the Health Resources Services Administration (2015), Florida has the largest number (223) of Dental Health Professions Shortage Areas designations in the Southeastern United States. This shortage affects more than 9.5 million Florida residents and implies a shortage of traditionally trained dental manpower at around 900. But an absolute shortage is only a part of the issue that affects the ability of individuals to have an oral health home.

Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta received funding from the Kellogg Foundation to examine ways in which an oral health home could be assured for all. A series of focus groups and surveys of community members and providers in Georgia, Florida and Mississippi were conducted to determine the snapshot of the status of access and to explore options.

Among community members, one underlying issue was cultural diversity in the workforce as consumers reflected on having someone who understood their context and limitations. According to studies, including one by the American Dental Education Association, dental providers from communities of color typically provide a disproportionate share of services to the poor, to communities of color and to those with Medicaid coverage.



Another major concern for community members was around the high cost of care, including the high cost of dental insurance and high co-pays. Added to concerns around cost are the limited number of hours of operation for working community members, and long waiting times for appointments. Some respondents also felt that they received unnecessary services if they did have dental insurance and thought

that this further compromised their oral health status.

An analysis of respondent dentists in Florida was undertaken. While the population of Florida is 57% White, the percentage of White dentists is 70%. While African-Americans represent approximately 12% of the population, they represent only about 3% of the dentists working in the state. Hispanics/Latinos are about at parity with the percentage of the population and the composition of the dentist providers though there were regional concerns about language.

The dentist respondents were in a variety of practice settings, including solo practice (37%), small group practice (22%), or corporate dentistry (5%). Medicaid was a major issue. Forty percent (40%) of the dentists responding said that they currently accept Medicaid but 9% indicated that they may cease services to Medicaid patients. Thirty-seven percent (37%) said that they do not provide services to consumers with Medicaid coverage and would not consider doing so. The low percentages of those accepting Medicaid exacerbates the issue of access and makes it difficult to insure an oral health home for all. And, while there is often much discussion of Medicaid, we forget that many senior citizens who have only Medicare have NO coverage for oral health care, are living on fixed incomes and have limited ability to pay for services at the current cost.

Addressing the oral health needs of Floridians and those in other states will ultimately require some consideration of other entrepreneurial models that include the use of mid-level providers working alongside dentists. The system that we have has never served all segments of the American community. Perhaps it is time for inclusive change.

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The Importance of Oral Health

By Kelly James, Guest Writer

Based on a report from the Commonwealth Fund, the most common chronic disease in the United States isn't heart disease, diabetes or hypertension. The disease is tooth decay, which is the most prevalent chronic condition among children and teens, and also affects nine out of 10 adults.



In 2000, a report by the U.S. Surgeon General identified oral disease as a "silent epidemic" and declared that "the mouth is a mirror to the body." New research is confirming what medical researchers and practitioners have long believed - that a person's oral health can significantly impact their overall health and quality of life.

A Qualis Health report classifies dental decay as an infectious disease and outlines the impact that poor oral health can have on someone's overall health. Among the findings in this report:

- Dental caries is the most common chronic disease of childhood. One-quarter (25%) of children aged 2-5 and half (50%) of children aged 12-15 suffer from tooth decay.
- Nearly 25% of adults aged 20-64 report having untreated dental caries, which at any age can lead to pain, tooth loss and infection.
- Among older adults (65 years and above), 25% have lost all of their teeth - putting them at risk for compromised nutrition and other complications.
- Oral and pharyngeal cancers, often diagnosed too late, kill more than 7,800 Americans each year, nearly double the number of patients who die from cervical cancer.
- Poor oral health can affect or contribute to other diseases and conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and premature birth.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) defines pediatric dental services as one of 10 essential health benefits that must be offered by all individual and small group health plans. In addition, all state



Medicaid and nearly all Child Health Insurance Programs (CHIPs) provide comprehensive dental benefits for children. Children eligible for Medicaid in Florida may enroll in the Child Health Check Up program, which provides regularly scheduled health checkups, dental screenings, immunizations and other medical services for children through 20 years of age. Dental care services include coverage for checkups, cleanings, fillings and more.

Adults without dental benefits face significant challenges to obtaining necessary care. Not all employers provide dental coverage as part of their benefit offerings, Medicaid only covers extractions, and "routine dental care" is explicitly excluded from Medicare coverage. However, services are provided through Florida County Health Departments, Community Health Centers and volunteer programs to provide relief for dental pain and infection. In addition, dental schools provide services by dental students and residents if the patient's needs are suitable for educational requirements. Information on programs available in each county can be found at the Florida Department of Health Dental Resource Information page.

For more information on oral health topics at all stages of life, please visit the American Dental Association Mouth Healthy page.

Kelly James
Director
Florida Blue Center for Health Policy

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Below are stories about oral health care provided to underserved populations from across Florida. Funds were made available to these organizations by the Florida Blue Foundation.

Children's Volunteer Health Network (CVHN)

Walton and Okaloosa Counties

Meet a Miracle!

Did you know that a tooth infection could be fatal? Melissa* brought her teenage daughter Elizabeth* to CVHN after a toothache intensified over time. Elizabeth had an abscessed tooth that needed to be extracted and the dental fees were unaffordable for her family. The family was uninsured and had no where else to turn. CVHN welcomed them and promptly scheduled an appointment for Elizabeth. Shortly after the tooth was removed, Elizabeth experienced a fever. Doctors diagnosed the condition as Mitral Valve Prolapse and found that the infection in Elizabeth's tooth had spread to her heart -- a condition that can kill. The volunteer provider got the wheels turning quickly and Elizabeth was admitted to the hospital and underwent successful surgery. After her recovery, Elizabeth returned to school healthy and happy.



Fast-forward six years.... Elizabeth and her family recently visited the CVHN office. We learned that Elizabeth earned a dance scholarship to a local college, has her first job and has started a family. Melissa is so thankful that CVHN exists in her community and said, "If it were not for CVHN, my daughter would not be sitting here next to me today."

**Names changed to protect the identity of the family.*

A Quarter of Hope

Zach Billingsley, executive director of CVHN, provided the following story from a day on the Mobile Dental Clinic.

I visited the Mobile Dental Clinic to see the bus in action while treating kids at a local elementary school. I had the opportunity to observe the kids being treated and helped walk them back to their classrooms after their treatments were completed. The dentist on the bus that day showed me X-rays of a 3rd grade little girl who had nine severely decayed teeth. Some were broken and decayed to the point of having just a stub of the tooth showing. All I could think was: How could a 3rd grader be going through that type of pain every day? How could she pay attention in school? How could she function?

I learned that she had visited the bus five times over the course of three weeks in order to spread out the pain of the restorative procedures required. I also learned that today was a special day because it was her last scheduled procedure. Our staff told me she was frightened the first couple of times she visited the bus; however, as I watched her interact with our staff, I noticed that she had become very comfortable over the past few weeks. Her smile and positive attitude were amazing to witness after seeing those X-rays.



Our staff completed the procedure, and, as we were walking her back to the classroom, she said, "Mr. Zach, I know my M om couldn't afford to fix my teeth, but you did it anyway and I want you to have this." She reached into her pocket and handed me a quarter.

Of course I politely returned the quarter. I still keep a quarter on my desk to get me through a tough day. That quarter is a reminder to all of us why we are doing this work. When an eight-year-old little girl has to worry about being able to afford dental care, and suffer with the pain of poor oral health, it is time for a community to come together and find a solution. The little girl is now 11. CVHN has given her a reason to smile, and, although she will surely encounter many other obstacles in her life, she now has hope for the future.

CVHN serves the uninsured and underinsured children of Walton and Okaloosa counties with free medical and dental services. The "Just for Grins" Mobile Dental Clinic focuses on preventive dental care and travels to schools and other locations where uninsured and underinsured children need dental care. The stand-alone CVHN Dental Clinic manages the more extensive, restorative cases. Combined, the two have provided 56,289 dental procedures to 5,989 unduplicated children, with a value of nearly \$3.5 million in free health services provided to the community. CVHN received a Florida Blue Foundation Sapphire Award Honorable Mention in 2009.

Central Florida Family Health Center -- True Health Orlando

Cheney Wellness Cottage

In 2012, Central Florida Family Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), opened the doors of its school-based health center at Cheney Elementary, located in east Orlando, to provide primary health care services to the students, minor siblings and faculty and staff of Cheney Elementary. In 2014, the Cheney Wellness Cottage opened its doors to the surrounding community to provide primary and dental care for the people in this community.



The Wellness Cottage was built on school grounds with a private entrance accessible to the school campus. Members of the community enter through a different entrance and receive services in an area separate from the area serving students. The school and wellness cottage are located in an economically disadvantaged area with many students at or near the poverty level. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shortage area designations, Cheney Elementary is located in Primary Care and Dental Care Health Professional Shortage

Areas, as well as in a Medically Underserved Area. The 32,000 people living there are classified as a Medically Underserved Population.

In addition to primary care for students, faculty/staff and the community, dental services are also provided. Since the beginning of the program, more than 1,200 adult patients, over 500 pediatric patients, and 40 dental patients have received services. In early 2015, a student sealant program was launched. With the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, preventative programming will be provided. The Healthy Smile program will educate students on brushing, flossing and healthy eating habits. Oral exams conducted in the classrooms will identify students who may need additional services. While the Cheney Wellness Cottage has a goal of being the preferred medical home of its community, it also aims to keep the students healthy and happy so they have the building blocks to a bright future.

Turning Points Manatee County

Making Smiles. Changing Lives.

Darrell and Frank are two people who do not know each other but have at least one thing in common - Turning Points.

Darrell

For the past seven years, Darrell, a U.S. Army Veteran, was homeless, ill and lived on the streets and in camps. Until recently, he thought that he "would be out there until I died."

Three months ago, his life changed for the better. Turning Points staff had heard about Darrell and knew that Turning Points could help him. When Darrell was located, he was not doing well, but he was not ready to give up his lifestyle that day. "I did not think I was worthy of all the attention," he said.



Soon after, he accepted the offer and began to receive the services he needed to help him turn around his life. At Turning Points, the dentist had to extract Darrell's teeth because of decay and prepare full dentures. The dentures were an important part of his physical and mental transformation.

Today, Darrell has housing and is receiving the medical and dental care he needs.

Frank

There is no mistaking that Frank is not lacking confidence. He can make friends with anyone on the spot and can put a smile on anyone's face. Even though he owns his own interior and exterior painting company, he is just getting by.

Last year, Frank's dentures plate broke and he did not have the funds to repair or replace them. He also did not have dental insurance, so replacing his dentures would cost thousands of dollars that he did not have. For six months, he endured without dentures.



"I could not talk to people anymore. I was too embarrassed because I didn't have any teeth. My business was affected. I thought I had no where to turn," said Frank.

A friend who had new dentures from Turning Points convinced Frank to contact Turning Points. When he finally called, Frank was placed on a waiting list because the need for dental care in Manatee County is so great. The call came and Frank showed up for his appointment. The dentist was able to make a denture mold that day.

Once Frank received his new dentures, his self-confidence returned. His painting business is thriving, and he once again is bringing smiles to other faces.

Darrell and Frank are only two of the thousands of people that Turning Point has assisted.

Turning Points is the one stop shop for preventing and ending homelessness in Manatee County. It provides day resource services (such as hot showers, clothing, laundry services, food), rental and utility assistance, veteran's services (employment, housing and child care), and free medical and dental care for the uninsured and underinsured.



Special Notices

2016 Sapphire Awards Nomination Applications are open on our website



The Florida Blue Foundation is now accepting nominations for the 2016 Sapphire Awards.

The closing date is September 18, 2015.

Please nominate some of the deserving **individuals, programs** and **organizations** in your communities across Florida.

[Click to apply.](#)



2016 Sapphire Symposium and Awards

April 20-21, 2016

The 2016 Sapphire Symposium and Awards are scheduled for April 20-21, 2016, at Rosen

Plaza, 9700 International Drive, Orlando, FL 32819. Mark your calendars and visit our website later this fall for more information.

The Sapphire Award is Florida's only statewide award that recognizes organizations, programs and individuals that have demonstrated excellence and innovation in addressing community health needs. Honorees will share approximately \$360,000 in award funds.

Questions can be directed to:

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