Emerging Professions

Dental Therapy

The Emerging Professions Integration Grant Program is part of the Practice Transformation goal of the Minnesota Accountable Health Model – State Innovation Model (SIM) testing grant. Specifically, the program focuses on expanding the number of patients served by team-based integrated/coordinated care by supporting the adoption of emerging provider types. One of those provider types includes Dental Therapists (DT) and Advanced Dental Therapists (ADT).

Dental Therapists are licensed, mid-level practitioners who can provide evaluative, preventive, restorative and minor surgical dental care within their scope of practice. DTs work under the direction of a dentist. ADTs are certified and, with advanced training and clinical practice, provide all the services that a Dental Therapist provides, plus additional dental services such as oral evaluation and assessment, treatment plan formulation, non-surgical extraction of certain diseased teeth, and more. While ADTs practice under the supervision of a dentist, the dentist does not need to see the patient prior to receiving care or be on-site during a procedure.

Dental Therapists and Advanced Dental Therapists play a key role in increasing access to dental care and preventing emergency room visits for dental related problems, and they help fill the gaps in providing dental care to low-income, undeserved communities.

Childhood Tooth Decay

Dental caries, also known as tooth decay or cavities, is a breakdown of teeth due to activities of bacteria and is the single most common chronic childhood disease. It is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. When left untreated, childhood tooth decay can negatively impact a child’s quality of life, inhibit cognitive and social development, and compromise growth, function and self-esteem.

Advanced Dental Therapist positively impacts health outcomes

JANUARY 2016

As an Advanced Dental Therapist (ADT) at Community Dental Care, Allison Dooley works collaboratively with dentists at the East St. Paul clinic to increase access to dental services for underserved populations, where 52 percent of the patients are children. There is a huge unmet need for preventive and restorative dental care for low-income and immigrant populations in Minnesota and through a SIM Emerging Professions Integration grant, Allison is serving a population that desperately needs attention.

A recent case involved a six-year-old girl who arrived at the clinic in throbbing pain. A licensed dental assistant immediately took an X-ray of the tooth and found that it was not restorable. Allison needed to extract it and have a space maintainer made. The little girl remained strong and positive while Allison anesthetized the tooth and gently wiggled it out. After the successful extraction, the patient gave Allison a big hug and thanked her for "getting me out of pain."

After the appointment, Allison referred the child to Community Dental Care's Program to Improve Community Oral Health (PICOH) to see the health educator. The health educator provided one-on-one education on how to correctly brush and floss teeth and why it was important, setting goals, nutrition and healthy eating habits. As a team, the licensed dental assistant, advanced dental therapist, and health educator provided this six-year-old with restorative and preventive treatment in a caring environment and the patient, free from pain, left the East St. Paul clinic with tools to help her maintain a healthy mouth.

In another case, Allison met with a refugee whose teeth had deep caries and were stained heavily due to tetracycline use in drinking water in Kenya (to prevent illness). Allison spent three months rebuilding and shaping her teeth and the patient is amazed at how she is able to fix her teeth and make them strong and healthy. The patient, new to this country, wants to learn everything she can about proper oral health care and disease management so her teeth and gums can stay healthy. Thanks to multiple visits with Allison, the patient’s confidence, oral health and home care have greatly improved.
Success with community dental clinics

May 2015

Thanks to a SIM Emerging Professions Integration grant, Ranae Maas joined the West Side Community Health Dental Clinic (WSD) and East Side Family Community Dental Clinics (ESFCD) as a Dental Therapist in September 2014. In that time, Ranae said she has experienced “great satisfaction” in witnessing stories of success with her patients.

One outstanding story started in May, 2015, when a dental patient named Tammy met with Ranae for an initial exam at ESFCD and shared her desire for healthy teeth, explaining that she had gone several years without dental treatment and recently gave up a heavy soda drinking habit. She went on to say that she used to have beautiful teeth and was now “embarrassed to smile.”

Tammy had already lost several teeth to decay and her remaining front teeth were severely decayed, causing her to be very self-conscious about the poor esthetics of her smile. Together, Tammy and Ranae scheduled several restorative appointments and began working to rebuild her smile. Ranae coordinated Tammy’s treatment with a collaborative management (CMA) dentist, providing all of the needed restorations while the CMA dentist completed root canal therapy and is currently in the process of getting removable partial dentures to replace Tammy’s missing teeth.

After each visit Tammy looks in the mirror in amazement, and each time she comes in she has a new story about a compliment she has received from friends and family about the changes in her smile. She shared that one of her co-workers made the comment, “You don’t have your snaggle teeth anymore,” and though embarrassed to be seen that way, Tammy remains confident because she knows that, thanks to the care received from Ranae, she will soon have her smile back.

To date, Ranae Maas is working to fulfill clinical hours for certification as an Advanced Dental Therapists (ADT) so that she can further expand the services she offers to her patients.

SIM History

In February 2013 the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) awarded Minnesota a State Innovation Model (SIM) testing grant of over $45 million to use across a three-year period. The goal is to help its providers and communities work together to create healthier futures for Minnesotans. Minnesota’s SIM initiative is a joint effort between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Health (MDH) with support from Governor Mark Dayton’s office.

Children’s Dental Services

A pioneer in Advanced Dental Therapy

October 2015

Children’s Dental Services (CDS) is an independent, non-profit agency that, since 1919, has dedicated itself to improving the oral health of low-income children by making affordable and culturally targeted dental care and dental health education available. In 2009, CDS worked to pass legislation that expanded the public dental workforce by allowing dental therapists (DTs) and advanced dental therapists (ADTs) to practice in settings that serve low-income and uninsured patients. CDS employed the first credentialed ADT in Minnesota and serves as a host site for all ADT and DT students in Minnesota.

Patient response to the ADT at CDS has been overwhelmingly positive. Many patients request to be seen specifically by the ADT, and parents report feeling assured about the quality of treatment their children receive. A specific example occurred in August 2015, when a parent called to make an emergency appointment for her child who was in pain and desperately needed to be seen. CDS’ ADT was able to see the child the same day and filled two of her teeth that had serious decay. The patient’s mother expressed immense gratitude toward the ADT, saying that she made her and her daughter extremely comfortable and that they planned to return for more regular dental care now that they have a provider that they trust and can rely on.