

PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER COMMUNITY



February, 2004
Issue 1

In Whatcom County...

❖ ¼ of low-income parents say they were unable to get dental care for their child during the last two years

❖ Only 17% of adults with Medicaid insurance received dental services in 2002

❖ Over 2/3 of adults pay some or all of their dental costs out-of-pocket

❖ Dental visits to the Emergency Department at St. Joseph Hospital rose 39% in the last two years

❖ People with financial limitations are more likely to:

- report poor oral health;
- have more cavities;
- have teeth removed because of disease;
- not receive treatment recommended by their dental provider.

****Coalition Update****

50 summit participants joined the coalition and the steering committee is now forming. Look for more information on page 4.

Oral Health Matters

For Whatcom County

Oral Health is a Public Health Issue

Greg Stern, MD

Dental decay is the number one chronic disease of childhood; it is 5 times as common as childhood asthma. The bacteria that causes dental decay is transmissible – meaning it passes from person to person. It is the most prevalent unmet health need in children. Add to this the fact that huge disparities exist (approximately 25% of children experience 80% of all decay) and we have a definite public health problem.

The Whatcom County Health Department is convening an oral health coalition to build on the work of many individuals and organizations in this community. On February 6th, we initiated this effort with a summit. This newsletter highlights some of the activities and outcomes of the summit. If you would like more information about the coalition, please contact Diane Lowry at 676-4593.

Summit Participants Share Ideas

Participants divided into three groups to focus on the oral health needs of children, adults and seniors. The coalition will consider these recommendations when developing the oral health action plan.

Children

- Adjust city/community water supply to optimal fluoride level
- Implement oral health curriculum in schools
- Train physicians and nurses in oral exams and fluoride varnish treatments
- Oral health training for gatekeepers for children and families



Adults

- Adjust city/community water supply to optimal fluoride level
- Organize volunteer opportunities for private practice dentists to serve low-income patients at no or minimal cost
- Improve the DSHS reimbursement level and process

Seniors

- Train key groups that have consistent contact with seniors such as home health workers, caregivers and families
- Adjust city/community water supply to optimal fluoride level
- Outreach education on the connection between oral health and overall health and well being
- Conduct a Smile Survey which includes adults and seniors



We thank participants for their efforts and abundance of ideas!

THANK YOU Summit Co-Sponsors!
Whatcom County Health Department
St. Joseph Hospital
Mt. Baker District Dental Society

Local Oral Health Professionals Speak Out

Diane Lowry

What challenges does our community face regarding oral disease and what opportunities can we take advantage of? Seven oral health professionals answered these questions at the Oral Health Summit. (See caption below photograph for names of panelists)

Challenges included the inability for the community health centers to address the dental needs of all low-income patients. Luisa Hicks stated that Sea Mar dental clinic sees approximately 10 to 12 walk-in adult emergency patients per day and that there is simply not enough help for adults. Monica King, DDS, agreed stating that even though Interfaith dental clinic benefits from volunteer dentists, it cannot do it all.

Maggi Kriger raised the dilemma of how to address the complex and significant dental problems of adults and seniors without sacrificing the recent increase in dental care for young children. Facilitator Chris Phillips asked how we could balance these two needs. Three solutions arose that panelists agreed with to varying degrees:

- Prioritize care for adults – emphasizing prevention;
- Expand the ability of dental hygienists to provide care for underserved populations;
- Explore adjusting fluoride concentration in water supply to optimal level.

Anita Munson Brock, RDH, identified the need to create safe spaces for providers to volunteer their services without taking on more patients with Medicaid insurance than they can handle. She also described the value of bringing dental care to immobile patients.



From left to right: Chris Phillips, St. Joseph Hospital; Anita Munson Brock, RDH, Advance Dental Hygiene Services; Maggi Kriger, ABCD Coordinator, Whatcom County Health Department; Dr. Ruth Veinote, DDS, Lummi Dental Clinic; Dr. Monica King, DDS, Interfaith Community Health Center; Dr. Curt Smith, DDS, Washington Dental Service; Luisa Hicks, CDA, Sea Mar Community Health Center; Jenny Shuler, CDA, BS, Bellingham Technical College

Dr. Domoto Encourages Coalition Building

Colleen White, RDH, BS

Dr. Peter Domoto, DDS, MPH, is Professor emeritus in the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Washington, School of Dentistry and was a keynote speaker at the Whatcom County Oral Health Summit. His inspirational speech titled “Coalition Building and Primary Oral Health Care” set the stage for the summit by discussing the nature of dental disease as well as community partnerships. He emphasized that caries (cavities) is an infectious disease that is transmitted by bacteria and is saliva mediated. He also stated that the agents necessary, but not sufficient, to cause cavities are: “susceptible teeth, bacteria, fermentable carbohydrates and time”.

Dr. Domoto shared his expertise in coalition building by describing one of his successes: Washington’s Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) program. In 1994 he collaborated with other child advocates to begin a statewide effort to expand access to dental care for Medicaid-eligible children under 6. Currently, there are over 200,000 children enrolled in this

program that has reduced dental fear in patients and their parents and has increased general practice dentists’ efficacy in providing dental treatment to young children. It is estimated that this program has reduced dental costs by \$1.3 million.

Dr. Domoto stated, “Coalitions are diverse by their very nature” and the ABCD Program is an example of this diversity. The key partners that have contributed to the success of this program include but are not limited to: University of Washington, state and local dental societies, state and local medical societies, the DSHS Medicaid Program, local health departments, and other child advocates.

Dr. Domoto’s words of wisdom for a successful coalition are to have “clear goals, trust, passion and energy” and he supportively stated, “I know Whatcom County has what it takes to make this happen.”



Dr. Peter Domoto, DDS, MPH

Newsletter Goals

- Unite those interested in promoting oral health
- Educate about oral health issues
- Highlight what is working
- Promote opportunities for involvement

For additional information on Oral Health in Whatcom County go to: www.happyteeth.org

Dr. Mouradian Emphasizes Partnership

Diane Lowry

Dr. Wendy Mouradian, MD, MPH, is an Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Washington. She holds joint appointments in Pediatric Dentistry and Health Services. Dr. Mouradian’s message at the Oral Health Summit was to increase partnership between the dental and medical communities.

One aspect of building these partnerships is to increase knowledge and comfort of oral health issues in the medical community. To do so, Dr. Mouradian has developed training

curriculum for family medicine residents and faculty regarding oral health promotion. Focus groups have found that barriers to incorporating oral health issues into physician’s routines include: lack of knowledge, self-efficacy, time and confusion over their role. However, opportunities exist to draw on physician’s focus on prevention; compassion for children in pain, and desire to answer parents’ questions about their child’s oral health.

What is needed, according to Dr. Mouradian, is: the integration of oral health into systems of care, especially for vulnerable populations; development of medical-dental collaborations; and creation of a standard of practice that includes oral health.



Dr. Wendy Mouradian

“Great conference. Very well organized and many good ideas generated. It will be important to continue the enthusiasm and involve a wide range of partners!”
—Participating dentist

ABCD



CORNER

About the Access to Baby & Child Dentistry Program

Several speakers at the summit mentioned the ABCD Program, and its success. Here is a little information about Whatcom ABCD, which is coordinated by the Whatcom County Health Department. For more info, or to enroll a child in ABCD, call (360) 676-6762 or e-mail mkriger@co.whatcom.wa.us

The ABCD program is designed to increase access to dental care for Medicaid-eligible children, birth to six, by linking children with ABCD dental offices. The program emphasizes enrollment by age one, preventive dental care visits and a child friendly approach.

Prior to referral to an ABCD dentist, new ABCD families receive an orientation with emphasis on keeping scheduled appointments and other barriers to care. Additionally, the ABCD coordinator is available to assist dental offices and patients with any questions or difficulties that may arise. ABCD dental offices have received extra training in working with young children, and are eligible for enhanced DSHS reimbursement and coverage.

Our local ABCD program is made possible by the combined efforts of Mt. Baker District Dental Society, Whatcom County Health Department, St. Joseph Hospital, Interfaith Coalition, Madrona Medical Pediatric Department, Opportunity Council, University of Washington, DSHS/MAA and WDS Foundation.

The Whatcom ABCD program had a very successful first three years. Twenty-five ABCD dental practices are serving the needs of Medicaid-eligible children, birth to six, in Whatcom County. As of December 31, 2003:

- 3897 children have been enrolled in ABCD
- 2899 have had ABCD dental visits (75% of ABCD enrolled children)
- Less than 5% no-show average reported

Our appointment rates are among the highest in the state! We are appreciative of the part that each person plays in increasing access to early regular dental care for this young, vulnerable population.

Oral Health Coalition Membership

The following summit participants, representing many community groups and organizations, have joined the oral health coalition. We thank you for your commitment and will be providing you soon with opportunities to be involved in the steering committee or work groups.

Pat Anderson, Ginny Baum, Dr. Doug Bixel, Charel Bondar, Pat Brady, Dr. Mark L. Brooks, Barbara Casort, Tiffany Cate, Jan Crouse, Janet Davis, Regina Delahunt, Sylvia Fragner, Dr. Ken Gass, Julie Gibboney, Margaret Gibson, Jennifer Glick, Maureen Godwin, Nona Groesbeck, M. Luisa Hicks-Romo, Heather M. House, Beverly B. Jacobs, Dr. Monica King, Dr. Robert Knudson, Carole Kornelis, Maggi Kriger, Jessica Lee, Diane Lowry, Andree Marcus, Erica Miner, Bob Monahan, Dory Monroe, Anita Munson Brock, Nicole Nickelson, Carolyn Nordtvedt, Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Lynnette Ondeck, Chris Phillips, Lesley Rigg, Becky Robertson, Dr. Patrick Rooney, Marian Russell, Dr. W.R. Saunders, Jenny Shuler, Dr. Curtis F. Smith, Dr. Greg Stern, Katie Uhlenkott, Nancy Waddell, Anne Wells, Colleen White, Judy Ziels, Shelly Zylstra

**If you know of anyone that may be interested in joining this effort, please contact:
Diane Lowry at 676-4593 or dlowry@co.whatcom.wa.us**

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