

# Penn State to help brush up oral hygiene in nursing homes

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People with dementia may soon have improved oral hygiene because of a National Institutes of Health \$1.4 million, four-year grant to Rita A. Jablonski, assistant professor of nursing, Penn State.

Cardiovascular disease, pneumonia and [periodontal disease](#) have all been linked to poor oral hygiene. Patients with dementia can be especially hard to care for because they often are no longer able to distinguish low or non-threatening situations from highly threatening situations -- leading to their resisting care by pushing the nurse away or fighting with their caretaker.

Jablonski and colleagues previously conducted a [pilot study](#) on their strategies for reducing care-resistant behavior in patients with [dementia](#) during oral hygiene activities.

"We have come up with 15 strategies -- techniques to help reduce threat perception," said Jablonski. Combined, these strategies make up the oral hygiene approach called Managing Oral Hygiene Using Threat Reduction (MOUTH).

The grant will allow the researchers to evaluate and validate the effectiveness of the MOUTH strategy, as well as calculate the cost.

"The purpose of this study is to determine whether care-resistant behaviors can be reduced, and [oral health](#) improved, through the application of an intervention based on the neurobiological principles of

threat perception and [fear response](#)," said Jablonski.

In addition to Jablonski, other researchers on the grant include Ann Kowlanowski, Elouise Ross Eberly Professor of nursing, Penn State; Douglas Leslie, professor in public health sciences, Penn State College of Medicine; Barbara Therrien, associate professor in nursing, University of Michigan; Ellen K. Mahoney, associate professor in nursing, Boston College; and Cathy Kassab of By the Numbers.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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