

Dental school, foster care agency partnership improves child health, aids student training

October 21 2012

A partnership between a New York City dental school and a local foster care agency has provided consistent dental care to more than 650 children, and may serve as a model for other dental school program curriculums. The success of Partners Against Caries (PAC), both for the participating foster children and dental school students, was outlined Oct. 21 at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference and Exhibition in New Orleans.

Poor dental and oral health can affect children's growth, school performance and attendance, and can contribute to physical and [mental health problems](#). Low-income children, especially those in foster care, are less likely to receive regular dental care, and as a result, face a greater risk of [tooth decay](#) and myriad oral health related problems – from heart disease, diabetes and [oral cancer](#), to low self-esteem and depression. According to Healthy Foster Care America, approximately 35 percent of children and teens enter foster care with significant dental and oral health problems.

The abstract, "An Approach to Dental Healthcare in an Inner-City Foster Care Population: The Partners Against Caries (PAC) Program," describes the partnership, which shifted dental services for these children from multiple providers to a single "dental home" in the spring of 2011. The goal was to improve care quality and continuity for the participating foster children, and to provide a unique learning experience for dental students. Through PAC, the children, ages 18 months to 21 years, receive dental exams, cleanings, fluoride treatment and family

education at two foster care facilities, as well as transportation and referrals to the college's [dental clinics](#) for more complex care.

"The program has been a positive experience for the children and families in foster care, as well as for the dental students," said study author Elizabeth A. Best, MPH, of the department of [pediatric dentistry](#), New York University College of Dentistry. "The pediatric patients enjoy receiving care from the young students, who are very engaged with the children."

For the dental students, the experience has been eye-opening, Best said. "Most of the dental students have little knowledge of the foster care system. We are now graduating dental students who have worked with this population, and are aware of their unique health care needs," Best said.

"Our exciting partnership not only addresses a heretofore gap in this service, but also serves as an invaluable tool for the [dental students](#) – introducing them to a most vulnerable pediatric population," said co-author Mitchell Rubin, MD, FAAP. "We are so happy that the children are getting such wonderful care."

"We definitely think that other schools could benefit from a similar experience and curriculum," Best said.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

Citation: Dental school, foster care agency partnership improves child health, aids student training (2012, October 21) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-dental-school-foster-agency-partnership.html>

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