



INSTITUTE FOR
Oral Health
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2011

focus group whitepaper

Oral Health and Prevention

Rebranding the Profession



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:: excerpt ::

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Introduction

Today's Americans face steep challenges in maintaining a healthy family amidst a troubling economy and an inadequate healthcare system. Dental care is often neglected due to lack of access or affordability –resulting in caries becoming the most common chronic disease in children. Families tend to seek emergency care only when oral health problems become too severe, which dramatically increases the costs of care for parents, taxpayers, and state programs. When we consider that nearly all oral disease is preventable –how do we advance the health care system to more successfully promote prevention?

In 2011, the Institute for Oral Health (IOH) tackles this issue, collaborating with experts around the nation to explore solutions for increasing dental disease prevention and early intervention to improve overall health. To support our 2011 theme “**Oral Health and Prevention**,” in January, the IOH hosted the first of two focus groups with expert panel discussions about solutions at the forefront of innovation in health care, aimed to advance how we think about and address dental disease prevention. In follow-up, the IOH will bring key findings and special guest speakers to a larger audience of critical stakeholders through our annual national conference, to be held October 27-28, 2011 in Chicago, Illinois.

Hosted in Orlando, Florida on January 28-29, 2011, this focus group was led by Institute for Oral Health Executive Director, Dr. Ron Inge, and featured leading authorities in dentistry, family medicine, and dental benefits dedicated to progressive oral health solutions for children and underserved populations. The group shared insights on the following topics:

- **Innovating the dental workforce** – To advance disease prevention, dental practice needs to shift from being procedure-focused to patient-focused –which means better health outcomes at a lower cost. To get there, we need to develop consistent and well coordinated processes; collect measurable data to improve the quality and effectiveness of care delivery; collaborate with physicians for early intervention; and educate patients on the importance of maintaining good oral health.
- **Engaging primary care in prevention** – As most young children see a family physician or pediatrician many more times than a dentist, it is important to engage these providers in helping to improve oral health and reduce the incidence of early childhood caries. Oral health training programs are becoming highly popular with physicians, helping them learn about dental issues, connections between oral health and systemic health, and how to conduct basic oral exams, risk assessments, and apply fluoride varnish.
- **Increasing care capacity for the underserved with dental therapists** – With the dental therapist as a new contributor in today's practice geared toward public health, a dental team can increase their capacity for serving Medicaid patients to improve access to care. The dental therapist can support the team with admissions, basic oral exams and preventive services, patient education on oral health maintenance, and practice management.
- **Strengthening sealant programs with a new business model** – To expand the reach and effectiveness of school-based dental sealant programs for needy children, the Sealants for Smiles program takes a progressive approach to managing their non-profit organization. By guiding the organization like a cost-effective private practice and establishing direct relationships with schools, product vendors, and dental plans, this program is succeeding in building valuable momentum across the state of Utah.

- **Advancing dental benefits to focus on prevention** – Dental plan design needs to transform to a more individualized, patient-centric model that supports more preventive care for at-risk patients to help improve health outcomes and lower the costs of care. As a step forward, some benefits organizations have developed initiatives to identify at-risk patients and conduct educational outreach to encourage them to see a dentist. Additionally, these organizations are partnering with primary care physicians to train and reimburse them for oral health preventive services and referrals to dentists.
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Join us for the 2011 Institute for Oral Health Conference

In follow-up to this year's focus groups, Institute for Oral Health is providing whitepapers and promoting relevant news and research through our website, quarterly newsletters, Facebook, and participation at health conferences around the nation. Culminating this year's theme is our **5th annual national IOH conference on October 27-28, 2011 in Chicago, Illinois** at the Sofitel Hotel. Learn more and register early for discount rates ~ please visit: WWW.IOHWA.ORG.

About the Institute for Oral Health

The Institute for Oral Health is dedicated to improving oral health in America by bridging the gap between research and everyday dental practice. Serving as a central resource for education and collaboration, IOH brings together nationally recognized experts to focus on important themes of concern in oral health care today, and works to promote innovation and adoption of progressive treatment guidelines, dental plans, and delivery methods.

learn more

Web: IOHWA.ORG ~ Register Online for 2011 Conference



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Sealants for Smiles – A Model for Prevention

After many years running his oral surgery practice and oral pathology lab, Dr. Roger Adams evolved his career into the business side of dentistry, focusing on business development for dental plans. He is now co-founder and CEO/President of *Sealants for Smiles*, a non-profit organization that provides free oral health education and preventive dental services to underserved children in schools across Utah. For this Institute for Oral Health discussion, Dr. Adams detailed how the organization applied new business models to a failing United Way program to transform it into a venture that successfully supports communities in need.

Rescuing a Public Health program

For many years, needy communities across Utah have suffered from a lack of access to dental services. In 2004, the United Way conducted community assessments and learned that the *number one* health need across communities was dental care. By 2007, Dr. Adams was engaged to evaluate a United Way dental program that was not performing well, and he quickly determined a number of business factors that were undermining its success. For starters, the program was overseen by a non-dental team who lacked interest in the project, and was subject to the United Way's standard 37% cut for administrative overhead. Additionally, the program was poorly staffed for providing dental services, and as volunteerism was so low, the United Way had allocated much of the program budget to hiring additional staff from temp agencies. Furthermore, as the organization was utilizing several different brands of donated dental sealants and there was no continuity to the delivery of the sealants, the quality of care was suffering as well.

The program itself provided real value to underserved communities, but it was mismanaged. Thus, Dr. Adams and a few colleagues agreed they would step in to drive improvements, but only if they could assume control over managing the program. In 2007, his group formed a non-profit corporation and the new *Sealants for Smiles* 501(c)(3) was born.

Building a strong foundation

As a new non-profit organization focused on delivering quality preventive dental services to children in need, *Sealants for Smiles* was established to run like a cost-effective private practice. From the get-go, Dr. Adams recognized that in order to succeed through ongoing funding, the program would need to be able to prove their value – and that means measurable results. To achieve this goal and best serve the community, the organization developed an infrastructure built on solid business practices, including:

- Hired a dedicated staff focused on using consistent, best practice protocols to ensure they could deliver a continuity of quality service and track their progress in terms of impact on the community's oral health.

- Secured high-volume deals and donations from a reputable dental sealant company, which provided enough inventory to effectively support the program with a single, consistent product.
- Required all hygienists to attend the sealant company's training twice per year.
- Created an engaging oral health education program for children and teachers.
- Partnered with the benefits company, Dental Select, as an oral health plan sponsor.

A promising start: Success highlights

In Utah's underserved communities, typically about a 60% of children have some incidence of caries, with about 30% of children demonstrating an urgent need for care. In the original United Way program, the dental team visited 33 schools and delivered sealants to over 4,000 children. In stark contrast, using the same budget, within their first year the *Sealants for Smiles* team achieved the following:

- Visited all 71 schools across the region;
- Provided oral health screenings for 4,500 children in grades two through six;
- Applied 15,000 dental sealants (in some cases multiple sealants per child);
- Applied 209 fluoride varnishes;
- Provided oral health education for over 9,000 children.

In subsequent years, the organization has continued to succeed in reaching many underserved children. Even as circumstances reduced participation to 64 schools, the group continued to increase the number of sealants delivered, "which told us we were targeting the right population," Dr. Adams noted.

As the *Sealants for Smiles* team continues to deliver preventive services to new children, they have also established a plan to rescreen children to measure progress. Each year they have focused on a different age group, and in 2008 they began with third graders who had previously received a dental sealant. After evaluating 1,678 sealants, the dental team found only 3% evidence of new tooth decay. In 2009-2010, rescreenings of fourth graders indicated a similar success with only 3% of children exhibiting new decay. In 2011, the team is rescreening fifth grade children, with results so far at about 3.6% incidence of new caries.

Driving success with oral health education

Another vital component of the *Sealants for Smiles* program involves delivering compelling oral health education that makes learning fun and easy for children. In the original program run by the United Way, oral health education was provided in the form of a skit presented in an auditorium full of children, which had a limited effectiveness due to the chaotic nature of big gatherings of kids.

The *Sealants for Smiles* team knew that to increase the impact with children, they needed to take a more focused, intimate approach to their oral health education. They developed an entertaining DVD that is typically shared with groups of children two to three weeks in advance of the dental team coming to the school to provide sealants. The DVD is presented by a *Sealants for Smiles* dental hygienist, who is available to answer questions afterward

and encourage the children to participate in the program. For education with sixth graders, the group provides a simple test that children take before seeing the DVD, and then re-tests them when the dental team is on-site delivering care. With testing so far, the group has found that children typically exhibit about a 20% increase in understanding about their oral health.

“There are four steps to change: Aware, Prepare, Act, and Maintain. You can’t just jump to Act – this education supports the awareness stage for kids, and the other parts of the program work to Prepare, Act, and Maintain –it’s a perfect model.”

– Dr. Sheila Riggs

Increasing participation through fund-raising

To drive growth for their non-profit organization, the *Sealants for Smiles* team focuses on fund-raising through several key channels, including:

- **Partnering with community councils** – In promoting the program to community-based organizations that support families near participating schools, the group gains donations from businesses involved with those schools. In other cases, community organizations have stepped up to fully fund a restricted scope of the program for various schools.
- **Underwriting from a dental plan** – This program has been most effective when managed by people who not only understand oral health and dentistry, but recognize the business needs from a for-profit practice perspective. Dr. Adams believes that a dental benefits company makes an ideal funding partner; for instance, to hire and pay for a dental hygienist to work for the organization. *Sealants for Smiles* is now sponsored by Dental Select, and their participation helps support the major goals of increasing access to care for those most in need and lowering the cost of care through preventive services.
- **Donations from dental product vendors** – As a cost-saving measure, the group negotiates with dental sealant and fluoride varnish companies to either donate product outright or finance the product inventory.
- **Promoting Medicaid enrollment** – As an indirect form of fund-raising, the Sealants for Smiles team works with schools to encourage Medicaid enrollment as a means to extending the sealant program’s services to more children in participating schools or to get non-eligible schools on board.

Advancing the reach of *Sealants for Smiles*

The *Sealants for Smiles* team sees that the combination of effective oral health education and preventive services is driving dramatic improvements in health outcomes, and perhaps more importantly, prompting a cultural shift in perceptions and behaviors.

Building on this success, Dr. Adams has worked hard to gain funding and approval to expand this school-based program to include more preventive services for more children. The superintendent of Salt Lake City school district recently approved the *Sealants for Smiles* program for all children from pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade to receive oral health education, sealants and fluoride varnish as needed.

“Our latest growth is really exciting. Now this becomes a true school-based prevention model. We’re going into a low-income environment and providing an opportunity at no cost to the parents to implement preventive services and education.”

– Dr. Roger Adams

As part of their latest step forward, the group encouraged schools to replicate the educational DVD and share it more widely –and it has had a big impact. As teachers gain approval from their principal or district superintendent, copies of the DVD have been making the rounds so successfully that Dr. Adams now receives calls “three to four per week from teachers and school districts all over the state, begging us to come into their schools.”

Extending the program for annual screenings

As Dr. Adams and his dental team have streamlined their process in visiting schools, they can now screen an entire school of children in less than one day, with each exam taking less than a minute with the help of an assistant. The Sealants for Smiles team is rallying schools to approve annual rescreenings to measure progress, ensure preventive services are delivered as needed, and identify high-risk children who may need more care.

Expanding services with on-site dental clinics

In another recent expansion, the Sealants for Smiles team will now offer a community oral health clinic at each of the 64 schools the program services, available throughout the week the team is onsite at a given school. Provided in partnership with public health, these mobile clinics are equipped to deliver full service dentistry as needed. With unanimous support from all 64 school principals, schools will remain open for longer hours to accommodate the clinic, and will heavily promote these oral health clinics across the community.

Creating a sustainable model for prevention

With *Sealants for Smiles*, Dr. Adams has brought his years of experience in both dentistry and business development to help create a sustainable model for prevention. The success of this non-profit organization can largely be attributed to a foundation of several sound business principles. The group has managed the organization with the same awareness of economics as a private practice, and invested in relationship-building to engage their target audience and viable partners to build buy-in and momentum, as well as garner financial support.

Through strong partnerships and an effective infrastructure for delivering dental services, the future of *Sealants for Smiles* looks bright. Dr. Adams anticipates they will continue to grow their funding and support to provide free preventive services to schools across the state. “It’s important that we not be dependent upon the volatility of grants and federal monies,” notes Dr. Adams.

With more extensive cuts expected in Medicaid, it is vitally important that organizations like *Sealants for Smiles* continue to expand their reach. With the added power of being a Medicaid-approved provider, the program now delivers a highly effective model that can be replicated across the country to bring care to children in need.

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Learn more online at
sealantsforsmiles.org
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