

# Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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## **Collaborative Experiential Learning Education Project**

The Experiential Learning Education Project is a collaborative effort between the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS), Burlington County College Department of Dental Hygiene (BCC), and Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers (SJFMC), a federally qualified community health center. The goal of the project is to provide students with a learning and student teaching experience in a community health setting while simultaneously providing oral health education to patients receiving dental services at a federally qualified health center. When the Project began, oral health education was provided only to patients receiving dental care services, however due to the positive response, the medical center administrative staff requested that the oral health education presentations also be provided to clients receiving services in the medical clinic. Administrative staff have requested that the program also be conducted at other SJFMC sites in the southern part of the State.

As a component of their dental public health coursework at BCC, second year BCC dental hygiene students are required to develop and conduct a comprehensive oral health education program for patients in the medical and dental appointment waiting areas of SJFMC's medical and dental clinics. Oral health education program materials were developed with a low literacy level along with many color pictures for easy understandability. In addition, students prepared a variety of Spanish language materials. The oral health presentation is conducted under the direction of the southern region oral health coordinator in conjunction with the NJDHSS Children's Oral Health Program Coordinator. Costs are minimal for the project and consist of patient education materials of a low literacy level and oral health resources provided by the NJDHSS. Students conduct the education presentation and also receive constructive feedback from BCC dental hygiene faculty. As part of the program curriculum, students submit a brief, reflective paper on their learning experience. SJFMC patients are randomly surveyed regarding their participation in the oral health education program. Survey response overwhelmingly highlights the education value along with the one-on-one attention given to young children participants.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Medical and dental patients in many instances were not aware of the importance of oral health to general well-being and therefore addressed an important oral health education need.
- Provide oral health personal care resources to program participants.
- The use of oral health models and audiovisual materials served to reinforce the education message
- Oral health education by students conducted under licensed supervision allowed the dental hygienists/dentists of the clinic setting to use allotted time for patient dental services rather than for education purposes. Using this model provided a cost saving and allowed the dentist to see more patients and provide dental care.

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