



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

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New York State Preventive Dentistry Program for Deaf Children

Handicapped persons are at greater risk of dental disease, for the most part, because of greater neglect or poor oral hygiene and access to routine dental care. Deaf patients in particular often fail to obtain needed care because of communication difficulties experienced in the treatment situation. New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Dental Health, through a contract with Bellevue Hospital, Health and Hospital Corporation, New York City, implemented the **Preventive Dentistry Program for Deaf Children** in 1983. The Bellevue staff and Bureau Dental Health staff have joint responsibility for the program's management. The program recruited a hearing-impaired dental assistant/interpreter to assist with the provision of oral health education and treatment services for the population of deaf children seen at the Bellevue dental clinic or at nearby schools for deaf children. Funding for the dental assistant is from the MCH Block Grant. The hearing-impaired dental assistant was trained to provide oral hygiene instructions to handicapped populations, to work one-to-one with handicapped persons to improve their oral hygiene, and to work with caregivers of handicapped persons to improve their skills for providing oral hygiene to individuals incapable of self-care. Hearing-impaired children (ages 13-19) and their guardians/care providers living in New York City and attending schools for the hearing-impaired are the target population. Outreach for the program is provided by the staff of the NYC Public School for the Deaf and the pediatric dental center at the Bellevue Hospital. Preventive and restorative services are available through the program at the Bellevue pediatric dental center. The program serves approximately 350 patients per year. Since 1983, the program has enabled deaf children and the children of deaf parents to access dental care and receive information about their oral health in their own language.

Contact Person(s) for Inquiries:

Dr. Peter Catapano, Director, Pediatric Dental Clinic, Bellevue Hospital Center, First Ave at 27th St., One South One, New York, NY 10016, Phone: 518-474-1961, Email: Pcatapano@bhc.org

Dr. Elmer L. Green, Director, Bureau of Dental Health, New York State Department of Health, ESP - Corning Tower Bldg., Rm. 542, Albany, NY 12237-0619, Phone: 518-474-1961, Fax: 518-474-8985, Email: elg01@health.state.ny.us