

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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Ministry of Health/Division of Oral Health- The Dental Service Provider in Palau

In the Republic of Palau, a U.S. Territory in the Pacific Basin, all health care services are under one governmental ministry. The Division of Oral Health (DOH), one of four divisions of the Bureau of Public Health under the Ministry of Health, is the only dental service provider in Palau.

DOH provides both clinical and preventive oral health services to a population of more than 20,000 people. To date, the DOH has 3 local dentists and 1 dentist from Japan who rotates every month to provide services to the community as well as the hospital settings. DOH is also working in collaboration with family planning, Maternal and Child care, Ministry of Education, Head start Program, Primary health care, Geriatric and home health, Tobacco Prevention control, Non-communicable disease prevention as well as other non-governmental organizations. Even though there are 2 private dental clinics in Palau, the Division of Oral Health still continues to provide over 10,000 encounters every year for the services provided. To leverage resources, a key strategy of DOH is integration and collaboration of oral health into programs.

DOH efforts include:

1. DOH utilizes four super dispensaries in the outlying states (outer islands) of Palau to provide community outreach programs. DOH schedules activities with other Bureau of Public Health programs so that these programs' community outreach efforts include dental services. This collaboration has been very successful over the years.
2. DOH is providing support to the Bureau of Public Health's new Community Advocacy Program, which promotes preventive health services and increase educational awareness programs for communities. DOH has successfully worked with a local business company to bottle fluoridated drinking water that is widely distributed and sold on the island.
3. A National Strategic Plan is being developed by the Bureau of Public Health. The Plan will include a revised Oral Health Plan for DOH to better serve the people and communities of Palau.

Lessons Learned:

1. Oral health is now working in alignment with the Palau Public Health Strategic Plan (PPHSP) in collaboration with other Public Health Divisions.
2. Despite the lack of funding (still no grants to support the program) the division of oral health is still providing exams, OHI to mothers, and fluoride varnish to the pre- schoolers
3. The division of oral health is working in collaboration with the Head Start Program, Public Health Nurses in conducting parents training on the importance of primary teeth and their role and how to keep them caries free.

4. The in-house training for the dental assistants was a success. A grant was secured to bring an oral health instructor from the Fiji National University who gave an intense in-house hygienist training for the 10 dental assistants to upgrade their skills. An external examiner also came for the in- house exams. To date, the 10 dental assistants were elevated to local dental hygienists who are now providing services to the school students.
5. The oral health surveillance system is still outdated and we also need a full time staff to enter data.
6. A plan to hire more Dental Assistants trainees to be trained locally is pending depending on the budget.
7. The Oral Health Strategic Plan in alignment with the Palau Public Health is outdated and to be revisited and revised.

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