

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

Practice Number: 54010
Submitted By: Washington Dental Service Foundation
Submission Date: January 2016
Last Reviewed: January 2016
Last Updated: January 2016

Oral Health for Caregivers

To address workforce development and access to dental care challenges, Washington Dental Service Foundation (WDSF) staff and clinical specialists developed a curriculum titled "Oral Health for Caregivers". It provides critical oral health information for paid and family caregivers who care for community-dwelling older adults – to improve the oral health of both care recipients and caregivers. The goal is to ensure oral care is included every day as part of the routine care delivered to clients and that clients receive dental services when needed. With an emphasis on prevention, the interactive demonstrations, visuals, and printed materials introduce oral health in an easy-to-understand format that can be used to educate caregivers. The curriculum was initially developed in 2007 and updated in 2011 and provides the latest information for a high-quality continuing education learning opportunity.

Key components of the trainings include:

- Basic oral care and disease prevention strategies
- Understanding the impact of medications on oral health
- How diabetes and other chronic conditions are interrelated to oral health
- Tactics for working with special-needs and behaviorally-challenged clients
- Hands-on practice and demonstrations
- Training modifications to meet diverse participant needs

WDSF offers continuing education training in a variety of formats for a diverse workforce of professionals. Trainings are presented by contractors with expertise with the target audiences and WDSF pays their fees. Training models include:

- **Training of professional trainers.** A 5-hour workshop for professional development and training managers. These professionals train caregivers as part of their core work and reach a large number of direct care workers. This includes partnerships with the Home Care Association of Washington, the Washington Home Care Association, Area Agencies on Aging, ResCare, and other community-based nonprofits that provide in-home care. Over 100 professionals are providing training to caregivers across Washington state.
- **Training of Adult Family Home owners, managers, and caregivers.** This 3-hour continuing education workshop is offered through the 11 Adult Family Home Council of Washington chapters. Participants receive training materials to teach other caregivers about the importance of oral health following the workshop. Over 200 AFH employees and owners have been trained since 2014.
- **Online training for direct care workers.** Through our partnership with SEIU Training Partnership, three, 1-hour oral health continuing education modules have been downloaded and completed over 60,000 times by home care aides since 2012.

All trainings and materials are provided free of charge to Washington residents (a small fee – approximately \$50-100 – is applied for out-of-state participants).

A 2008 evaluation* demonstrated that the oral health curriculum changes how caregivers provide oral care to their clients, their families, and themselves. It showed that trained caregivers are much more likely to provide direct assistance with oral health care to clients than untrained caregivers. This assistance includes:

- helping clients access dental care

- prompting or assisting in some way with the brushing of teeth or cleaning of dentures
- paying attention to the fit of dentures
- encouraging clients to actually wear their dentures
- using or recommending dry mouth remedies
- looking in a client's mouth for possible problems

**Complete printed evaluation available upon request, or can be viewed [here](#).*

Currently, WDSF is expanding its educational outreach to include family caregivers caring for loved ones with dementia and for kinship families (mostly grandparents raising grandchildren).

In partnership with the Alzheimer's Association *Oral Care Cards for Caregivers* was produced in 2015. Using research-based strategies provided by Dr. Rita Jablonski from University of Alabama, Birmingham, 15 simple techniques are illustrated and described for caregivers to more effectively assist with or provide oral care for those with dementia. Already, over 5,000 guides have been distributed in both English and Spanish language versions.

Lessons Learned:

A number of lessons have been learned along the way. Primarily that the training delivery program must be flexible – in scope, in length, and in delivery. It's also critical that the courses are endorsed by the appropriate credentialing entities so that attendees can obtain continuing education credits to put toward their annual requirement.

It's been encouraging to see the enthusiasm from workshop attendees at all levels. There is a genuine interest in the content and an urgency that is sparked once caregivers understand the important impact oral health has on their clients' overall health.

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