

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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Oral Health Workforce Grant Brings Healthier Smiles to CNMI

There are two areas of dental public health activity that are being done by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Public Health Oral Health Program (OHP):

1. Reduction of decay in children by the OHP staff through the school sealant program (2nd-6th grade in CNMI and additional 1st graders in Rota and Tinian), the Head Start fluoride varnish (FV) program, the Wrap Around Program on Rota and Tinian and the prenatal dental preventative program on Saipan. All school activities are in partnership with the Public-School System (PSS) and binding by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which states the responsibility of each party. The Prenatal Dental Referral Program is a collaborative effort between Women's Clinic, MCHB and OHP to treat prenatal patients at every point of their visit within each department. This has allowed for a decrease in decayed teeth in CNMI children. Rota and Tinian, not having had access to preventative and curative treatment including the school sealant program in years.
2. Reduction in the morbidity rate of oral cancer in CNMI through a collaborative effort of all dental clinics in the CNMI providing FREE oral cancer screening in an effort to detect oral cancer in its early stages. The medical and dental team together created a policy to effectively provide dental preventative measures for the newly diagnosed oral cancer patients for better health outcomes after cancer treatment. Partnerships were formed between OHP and other local health agencies such as Non-communicable Disease Program (NCD) and Comprehensive Cancer Coalition Program (CCCP) to provide cessation and awareness programs on the association between betel nut chewing and oral cancer. OHP with Public School System (PSS) and other community agencies together provide a venue to raise oral cancer awareness and oral cancer screening. The Oral Cancer Outreach with the school system is unique in that it includes other health agencies; the Non-Communicable Disease Program (NCD) specifically tobacco program and Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (CCCP) and Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) in the MOU with PSS.

Costs are shared by the Oral Health Workforce (OHWF) grant, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation, and PSS. Outcomes achieved are the lower number of children with decayed teeth and number of individuals who either never started or have stopped chewing betel nut that is associated with oral cancer in the CNMI. The negative aspect is the geographical remoteness of both Tinian and Rota, with no dentist in residence thus not allowing continuous dental care.

Lessons Learned:

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) had to be established between OHP/Public Health and the Public-School System which takes time due to the legality of signage. Therefore, the process for the MOA to be signed must be initiated well before the school year begins.

To work in partnership with other agencies including Public Health requires extensive organizational collaborative efforts in alignment with other programs policies especially as it pertains to funding sources.

Funding for programs can be difficult so innovative alternatives must be thought of and hence partnerships are formed.

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