

EXPANDED DENTAL HYGIENE PRACTICE

STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE DENTAL CARE WORKFORCE IN HEALTH CENTERS



MAXIMIZE

Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice Improve Comprehensive Dental Treatment and Extend Dental Care



HEALTH CENTER

RAVENSWOOD FAMILY HEALTH NETWORK (SOUTH COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER, INC.)

LOCATION

EAST PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

PATIENT

VOLUME (2022)
20,288

STATE POLICY LEVER

Provisions for expanded function dental hygiene in community-based settings

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Dental navigators support scheduling and some chairside services
- Expanded function dental hygienists work in close collaboration with health center dentists

POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

- Increased access to preventive and basic restorative services in new settings
- Dentist time freed up for complex restorations and surgical procedures.
- All dental staff work at the top of their training and license

THE CHALLENGE

Ravenswood Family Health Network (Ravenswood) identified a need to increase access to preventive dental services for the pediatric population.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY

California has occupational regulation provisions for Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice (RDHAP). The RDHAP is a licensed dental hygienist who:

- Holds a current registered dental hygiene license
- Has been engaged in clinical practice as a dental hygienist for a minimum of 2,000 hours in the immediately preceding 36 months
- Possesses a bachelor's degree or its equivalent
- Completes 150 hours of an approved RDHAP program
- Passes the Dental Board's written examination

An RDHAP provides dental hygiene services independently in public health settings for up to two years after a patient has been seen by a dentist or physician and has a written prescription for dental hygiene services.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY IN ACTION

RDHAPs provide preventive services to patients in settings outside the four walls of the dental clinic. The RDHAP's work in preschools, school-based health center sites, and the mobile clinic. They take x-rays and photos and provide preventive services, such as oral prophylaxis, fluoride, and sealants, scaling and root planning and silver diamine fluoride application and interim therapeutic restorations. The RDHAP is supported by a dental navigator who helps with scheduling and administrative tasks and performs limited chair side dental assisting. The dentists formulate treatment plans using the photographs and radiographs collected by the RDHAP and utilize asynchronous tele-dentistry model of care.

THE IMPACT

By optimizing their state's RDHAP policies, Ravenswood has improved access to dental care by providing additional preventive and restorative services to an expanded patient population in new settings. Staff dentists are supportive of these care team members. Their inclusion on the dental team has increased access to services for patients who now must make fewer visits to the dental office to complete their treatment plans. Dentist time is freed up for complex restorations and surgical procedures.

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