

PENNSYLVANIA RURAL HEALTH

Lead Exposure in Children:

Community-based Approaches
to Address a Pervasive Issue

NEW PENNSYLVANIA PROGRAM

to Help Curb Opioid
Misuse

VALUING VACCINATIONS ACROSS GENERATIONS

A New Way to Think
About Vaccinations

INTEGRATING ORAL HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE

Promoting Long-Term Health
Outcomes for Rural Residents

Integrating Oral Health and Primary Care: Promoting Long-Term Health Outcomes for Rural Residents

Tooth decay is a 100 percent preventable disease, and we have a great deal of evidence demonstrating the importance of oral care and its role in systemic well-being,” said Sean Boynes, DMD, director of interprofessional practice at the DentaQuest Institute, located in Westborough, Massachusetts. “From the time the first tooth emerges, a child should be receiving fluoride varnish—a simple step that can prevent a variety of future health issues.” The DentaQuest Institute provides clinical care and practice management solutions that help health care providers improve oral health.

“For people living in rural areas, it can be hard to find a dentist who will see a child before age three,” explained Kelly Braun, RDH, MSDH, dental delivery systems coordinator at the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH). “That’s why we have been working with our partners in dental care and primary care to find ways to provide not only fluoride varnishes to babies but also risk assessment and referral mechanisms.”

Seeking to address the disparities in rural areas across the country, the DentaQuest Institute launched the Medical Oral Expanded (MORE) Care Collaborative to provide primary and secondary preventive oral health services in primary care medical offices to underserved populations and test optimal patient-centered referral systems between primary care and dental care teams. Beginning in South Carolina and now in Pennsylvania and Colorado, the Collaborative is coordinated through the respective states’ offices of rural health.

“Through MORE Care, we are trying to facilitate oral health networks in rural communities to improve access for people living there, improve the quality of care they receive, and help build networking and infrastructure to



Kelly Braun, R.D.H., M.S.D.H., PORH's dental systems delivery coordinator, is leading the implementation of the MORE Care Collaborative in Pennsylvania.

allow the community to function as a whole, from a health care perspective,” said Boynes. “Ultimately, we want to defragment a fragmented rural health system.”

In Pennsylvania, the focus of MORE Care is on children from birth to age five. “Insurance companies will pay for fluoride varnish in primary care offices,” stated Braun. “It’s very effective, and it can halt decay or prevent decay from progressing. If medical providers can provide it, and insurance companies can reimburse it, why isn’t it happening more?”

The goal through MORE Care, she explained, is not only to apply preventive varnish but also to encourage primary care providers to “actually look in patients’ mouths. “Every time they come to their pediatrician for a well-child visit, an oral health risk assessment should be completed and fluoride varnish, anticipatory guidance, and a dental referral also should be provided.”

“MORE Care is also about increasing awareness,” Boynes stressed. “We want parents and caregivers to understand they can make a difference in their own health and systemic, long-term well-being, as well as that of their children.”

“The younger a child is when he or she receives preventive oral health care, the better chance that child has of leading a healthier life and having positive outcomes.”

Sean Boynes, DMD

MORE Care in Pennsylvania will focus on identifying seven to ten rural health clinics in dental provider shortage areas, providing resources and training, and building a dental referral network. As of September 2016, nine clinics have been identified; the first learning session was held in the fall of 2016. Two additional learning sessions, presented by expert faculty from the commonwealth, will be held over the course of a year, after which the program will be evaluated, modified, and possibly rolled out to more providers.

“This initiative is both a learning process and a journey,” explained Braun. “We hope clinics will be open to changing some of the things they’ve been doing in their offices related to oral health.” And, she adds, “We have had a great, team-based approach with the DentaQuest Institute. By combining the knowledge they gained in South Carolina with ours, we’ll find what works best for Pennsylvania.”

While the DentaQuest Institute is providing financial support for MORE Care, Boynes looks at it differently. “The DentaQuest Institute does not really look at itself as a funder but more as a partner,” he asserted. “We come in and offer our expertise, knowledge, and resources to facilitate what our partners need. We help set up the infrastructure they need to have a successful program,” he said, adding that the DentaQuest Institute is working with Pennsylvania in part because of its strong office of rural health.

“The people at PORH care about working with rural communities to make them better. They want to drive change, and they are going to help us develop a model that can be disseminated on a national level.”

For more information on the MORE Care Collaborative in Pennsylvania, contact Kelly Braun, RDH, MSDH, at 814-863-8214 or via e-mail to kub277@psu.edu. For more information on the DentaQuest Institute, contact Kelli Ohrenberger, MA, at 857-383-9252 or via e-mail to kelli.ohrenberger@dentaquestinstitute.org.

Department of Health Publishes State Health Improvement Plan

The Pennsylvania Department of Health announced in July 2016 the publication of the Pennsylvania State Health Improvement Plan 2015-2020 (SHIP). The plan is the culmination of a two-year public process that began in 2014 and was developed using Public Health Accreditation Standards for SHIPs. The SHIP was developed by the Division of Plan Development (Bureau of Health Planning) in partnership with broad representation of public health system stakeholders across the commonwealth, other state agencies, and representatives of Department of Health programs. Participants in this public health planning process were engaged to identify critical Pennsylvania health improvement priority areas to be addressed in Pennsylvania over the next five years through state-wide collaborative and strategic efforts.

The three Pennsylvania SHIP health priorities are:

- Obesity, physical inactivity, and nutrition;
- Primary care and preventive services; and
- Mental health and substance use.

As a five-year strategic plan, SHIP establishes population health status goals and objectives and includes recommended strategies to achieve those goals and objectives. The SHIP also identifies lead and collaborating agencies and organizations in addition to the Department of Health, which will implement SHIP strategic initiatives.

An Advisory Committee of stakeholders and department staff guided the development of SHIP. Three task forces of experts representing each of the three health priority areas created the objectives and strategies recommended in the SHIP. The Advisory Committee and task forces will guide the five-year SHIP implementation. The Division of Plan Development in the Bureau of Health Planning will continue to coordinate this state-wide health improvement initiative. Progress toward achieving objectives will be measured utilizing data collected by the Department of Health and by other organizations and agencies.

The SHIP can be accessed at the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s website at health.pa.gov/Your-Department-of-Health/Offices-and-Bureaus/Health-Planning/Pages/State-Health-Improvement-Plan.aspx.

For further information on the SHIP, please contact Mark Milliron, public health program administrator, via e-mail to mamilliron@pa.gov or to 717-772-5298.