

Vermont State Dental Society 1-22-11

2011 Position Statements on Access to Oral Health and Oral Health Care

The Vermont State Dental Society (VSDS) is the leading voice on oral health issues in Vermont. The VSDS is a voluntary membership organization of dental professionals who work to improve the oral health of the citizens of Vermont. The VSDS is committed to ensure that every Vermonter receives oral health care in a timely manner in a dental home, and to ensure a sufficient and qualified dental workforce. The VSDS accomplishes these goals through public education, member services and its government relations program.

ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL ORAL HEALTH CARE

The VSDS is committed to ensuring that any individual in need of dental care has access to treatment. Vermont has historically ranked high, if not the highest, among states in providing access to dental care services to low-income children and adults.

Enhance the Current Dental Delivery System by Determining Actual Barriers for Those Without Care

A host of barriers prevent people from accessing comprehensive dental care. The specific barriers for each individual or community in Vermont are unique. The VSDS has convened a Committee to Improve Oral Health of Vermonters to identify and recommend solutions to barriers to care for specific populations in need. This Committee and the VSDS membership will work with the Vermont Department of Health on a three-year comprehensive evaluation of oral health issues, including access to care, to determine the barriers to preventative and restorative dental care. The VSDS looks forward to working with the Dept. of Health and others in utilizing the results of this assessment to enhance the oral health prevention and care delivery system for all Vermonters.

Support and Enhance Diverse Dental Facilities

In Vermont, oral health prevention and restorative services are provided through a geographically diverse network of private practices and dental clinics. Private practices currently account for 80% of all the dental care provided to Vermonters on the Medicaid program.

In addition to the private practitioners there are dental clinics such as the “Walk In Clinic” in Brattleboro, “Vermont Dental Care” in Barre and Winooski, the Red Logan Dental Clinic in White River Junction, and the expansions of the existing FQHC’s (Community Health Centers) and their affiliated dental clinics that have enhanced the capacity to provide oral health care prevention and restorative services by reaching out to those not currently receiving care.

The VSDS believes that by enhancing the capacities and continuing the missions of Vermont’s diverse dental facilities, which include private practice and clinics, the access to oral health and oral health care for all Vermonters will be improved.

Fully Fund and Expand Vermont's Tooth Tutor Program

The VSDS participates in the Vermont Tooth Tutor Program. This program is an effort to ensure that all Vermont Head Start and school children have access to a dental home for comprehensive preventative and restorative dental services. The VSDS supports the expansion of this program to all Vermont schools where identified oral health deficiencies exist.

Expand Adult Medicaid Dental Benefits: The VSDS continues to support the completion of all components of the "Dental Dozen," a thoughtful 3-year plan to improve the oral health of Vermont's most vulnerable. Unfortunately the plan was not funded in 2009, the third and most critical year of funding.

While the VSDS continues to place a priority on dental benefits for children, the needs of low-income adult Vermonters cannot be ignored. The current adult Medicaid dental benefit program is less than a basic or minimal program due to under funding. We advocate for its continuation with sufficient funding so that these Vermonters have access to the oral health care necessary for good health. The current adult Medicaid program provides adults access to emergency and basic preventive and restorative services with a yearly cap on payments for most services of \$495. This restrictive cap was at \$500 in 1989.

Increase Medicaid Funding to Provide Care: 93% of Vermont dentists provide care to Vermonters eligible for Medicaid (from Department of Vermont Health Access January 2011). However, dental provider reimbursements are deteriorating for dental practices serving state-funded patients. Yet selected practices receive a higher reimbursement. VSDS supports increasing Medicaid provider reimbursements with a goal of eventually reaching full, cost-based and equivalent reimbursements for all dental care providers.

DENTAL WORKFORCE

Maintain an Appropriate Dental Care Workforce in Vermont: VSDS is committed to ensuring that there are appropriate numbers of dental professionals statewide to meet the oral health needs of Vermonters now and in the future. In cooperation with the Vermont Dentist Workforce Development Committee, the VSDS coordinates efforts to attract dentists to Vermont. The VSDS coordinates with the Vermont Area Health Education Centers' (AHEC) Pipeline health career program to attract Vermonters to careers in the profession.

The VSDS also recruits dentists to practice in Vermont with a focus on maintaining a dentist workforce in Vermont's smaller cities and towns by using a dentist recruitment coordinator. The position of a dentist recruitment coordinator has been successful in attracting 23 dentists to practice in Vermont over the past 3 years with demonstrated improvement in access to oral health care. We seek ongoing financial support to continue this position. Recruitment visits are made to dental schools and dental events. A job

opportunities section of the VSDS' web site (VSDS.org) matches existing practices with potential new dentists.

VSDS Executive Board Position Statement -Added May 25, 2011

Re: Creation of new type of oral health care/dental provider in Vermont

We join with the Vermont Oral Health Coalition in the effort to identify barriers to dental care and devise practical solutions to address them. At the same time, VSDS member dentists and their dental team members continue to advocate and provide for the oral health needs of Vermont's most vulnerable populations.

The Vermont State Dental Society is opposed to the creation of a new oral health care provider at this time. We recognize that barriers to care exist for some Vermonters, but it is not clear that adding additional types of oral health care providers would address these barriers. Until the facts are identified, we feel it is premature to propose a solution.

University of New England (UNE): The Vermont State Dental Society supports the proposed new dental school at the University of New England. The dental school will focus on identifying and training dental students with a focus toward practicing in non-urban areas such as the three northern New England States.

Support Loan Repayment Programs: The VSDS seeks legislative support of our recruitment efforts by restoring funding to the Vermont Health Professions Loan Repayment Program that was eliminated in the FY2009 Vermont state budget.

Support Education for Dental Professionals: The VSDS has worked aggressively to ensure the establishment of new schools of dental hygiene now affiliated with Vermont Technical College and dental assisting at the Center for Technology Essex and we continue to support these programs. The VSDS was the key organizer in the establishment of a sizable scholarship program for dental hygiene students. Both of these programs are thriving and are at capacity for applicants.

PREVENTION – THE KEY TO GOOD ORAL HEALTH

Promote Personal Oral Health Care and Nutrition: Through proper nutrition and personal oral health care, individual Vermonters can prevent most dental problems and reduce the need for dental treatment (and decrease dental expenditures). The Vermont State Dental Society supports policies and programs to advance personal oral health care and healthy nutrition that will lead to improved oral and general health.

Continue and Expand Community Water Fluoridation: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls community water fluoridation (along with vaccinations and infectious disease control) one of the ten great public health achievements of the 20th century. The Vermont State Dental Society supports science based community water fluoridation and encourages its continuation and expansion.

Create Benefits for Pregnant and Nursing Mothers: The VSIDS recommends an enhanced dental benefit plan for pregnant women and nursing mothers who are eligible for Vermont Medicaid. Scientific evidence has shown that the transfer of bacteria from mother to young child is also a cause of “Baby Bottle Tooth Decay” now known as “Early Childhood Caries.” Our proposal is to offer these women who are eligible for Vermont Medicaid the same dental benefits as the state employee dental plan. This would be a comprehensive dental benefit plan, but without co-payments or deductibles. This effort would improve the health of the mother, and it would reduce the incidence of Early Childhood Caries in the most vulnerable of Vermont’s young children.

Oral Health and Health Care Reform

Dentists are the primary care providers of oral health in Vermont.. 80% of practicing dentists are general practitioners/pediatric dentists - the primary care dentists most Vermonters see. Dental specialists compose only 20% of the workforce. This is almost the opposite ratio of medical primary care to medical specialists. Current dental practice is based on a patient centered “dental home” concept that provides a comprehensive and coordinated expanse of dental health preventative and restorative services. Oral health education is central to this concept that also includes preventative and restorative services. This is an approach to prevention and care delivery that medicine in Vermont is seeking to achieve through programs such as Vermont’s chronic care initiative and medical home concepts.

In the dental model, a licensed dentist supervises a team of well-educated and trained individuals who strive to efficiently and effectively enhance the oral health of Vermont residents. This system of care delivery has been very effective. An increase in the availability of dental benefit and an increase in funding for state dental benefit programs for low-income populations would enhance access to care. The current system that allows stand alone dental only insurance plans option should be preserved. When dental benefits are bundled in a medical plan insurance, the dental benefits often become the first casualty of cost reduction efforts. In order to reduce this consequence we advocate for keeping the stand-alone dental insurance option.

When considering reform options, we recommend that the oral health programs for low income Vermonters receive the highest priority.

Most oral disease is preventable

Over 50% of the needy at risk populations where dental care has been made available through government plans do not access this provided care. The concept of a Community Care Coordinator who can focus on the social service component of linking needy individuals and families to a dental home should be considered. This new dental team member could be an enhancement to the Vermont Tooth Tutor Program.

We recognize Vermont’s desire to provide health care for all. While it pursues reform, it is important to understand the different and positive way in which the dental system has evolved over the years.

Dental Amalgam: The VSDS supports the continued availability of dental amalgam as a dental restorative material. It is one of several restorative options available to the patient to discuss with their dentist. The choice should rest with the patient working with his or her dentist, not the government. In 2009, the FDA, based on an intensive review of the scientific record, placed no restrictions on the use of dental amalgam. At the same time, VSDS recognizes that dentists must be good stewards of the environment. The VSDS and Vermont dentists have been leaders nationally in proper dental office waste management including support for the installation of dental amalgam separators. The VSDS was recognized in 1999 with the Vermont Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in Pollution Prevention. In 2008, the VSDS produced a consumer oriented dental filling fact sheet which is readily available in most Vermont dental practices to assist patients in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of all dental filling restorative materials. You may view it here:

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