

Physician Assistant Students Supporting the Integration of Oral Health now (PASSION)

Elyse Bigler*, Brett Gliem*

Faculty: Kim Darden

Department of Physician Assistant, College of Health Professions

Oral health is a vital component of preventive medicine. Routine oral health care is associated with decreases in both systemic infection and heart disease. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends children, beginning at six months of age, receive an oral health risk assessment. In Kansas, 91 of 105 counties have dental professional shortages making routine oral health screenings and prevention inaccessible. These "dental deserts" are most prevalent in western Kansas. Oral health exams are underutilized across the nation in primary care facilities. Our research focuses on teaching primary care providers (PCPs) in a rural clinic the importance of oral health screenings and techniques to provide a preventive service of fluoride varnishes to pediatric patients. Wichita State University (WSU) physician assistant (PA) students received interprofessional education from the WSU dental hygiene program on fluoride application technique. A rural pilot site in western Kansas was selected. PA students from WSU taught and orientated the PCPs at the site on incorporating fluoride varnish and oral health screenings into routine well-child exams. Data was tracked through coding and billing for services provided. Before the intervention, zero pediatric oral health screenings were completed and documented at the pilot site. Post intervention, there was an increase in the number of fluoride varnish applications and overall oral health prevention at the pilot site. The study aimed to establish precedence for routine preventative oral health care in rural primary care settings.