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The Importance of Early Dental Appointments & Oral Screenings for Children

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*College of Health Professions
Applied Sciences Poster Presentation*

Abstract: Problem Statement: Millions of low income children go without dental care, including routine exams. Educating nursing students may improve this number significantly. Purpose: This project focus was to provide interprofessional collaboration between dental hygiene and nursing students. The goal was to provide pediatric oral health education to nursing students that they can then share with their own patients. Methods: A review of five journal articles from the PubMed database was performed to assess information related to dental disparities in pediatric patients. One journal article was specific to a study regarding how competent nursing students felt about dental hygiene procedures. Results: Participants felt most comfortable discerning normal and abnormal structures in their patient's mouths and felt least comfortable recognizing oral symptoms of systemic diseases as well as having discussions regarding the use of xylitol, chlorhexidine and fluoride. Data collected revealed that Latino and African American children had higher rates of dental caries than Caucasian children and low-income and rural children were less likely to have dental care or routine exams than urban and higher-income children. Conclusions: Suggestions for interprofessional education workshops with healthcare professionals to ensure oral screenings are given to all children regardless of access to dental care, with emphasis on Latino or African Americans, ranging from newborn to twelve years of age. The significance of the oral hygiene education was to emphasize the link between oral and systemic health and how some systemic diseases have oral manifestations that should be observed by all healthcare professionals to properly care for their patients.

Faculty Mentor: *Julie Martin*