



MOHC Mentorship Program

08/09 Pilot Program Report

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Program Development

The MOHC Mentorship Program was developed to partner pre-dental students with Community Health Center (CHC) dentists in an effort to inspire future dentists to serve in the public health sector in Michigan after graduation. The purpose of this project is to fulfill Michigan's State Oral Health Plan to develop workforce programs.

The development of the MOHC Mentorship Program began in January, 2009 through a Health Resource and Services Administration Workforce Grant in partnership with the Michigan Department of Community Health. The grant specifies in Goal 19, action step 10 of the Michigan State Oral Health Plan to develop a mentorship program for dental students to encourage dental recruitment for public health. Discussions with University of Michigan Dental School educators and students led to additional discussions of how early student involvement in community dentistry could influence a student's decision to practice in underserved areas. Development of the program was divided into two parts. The first was to find interested undergraduate students who would participate in a student-taught curriculum at the University of Michigan Dental School. The second was to develop the mentoring program by pairing students with participating Community Health Clinics. University of Michigan Dental School graduate students created training curriculums for pre-dental undergraduate students to learn more about the MOHC Mentorship Program, and prepare them for the experiences, rewards, and difficulties in serving in a community health environment. Victoria Lucas Perry, a U of M dental student and student-teacher for the program, describes the student development process, "The curriculum included an orientation, lectures covering an array of topics in dentistry which gave students a foundation in the terminology and facets of dentistry, and concluded with a hands-on assisting workshop in the clinics."

The second piece of development was to write a Mentorship Handbook describing the programs expectations for the pre-dental students and Community Health Clinics. Program goals, expectations from the students and the clinics, and a student application process were prepared and distributed to those who were interested in applying. Program goals are as follows:

- Educate pre-dental students about Community Health Centers and how they are necessary to the public.
- Offer students a better understanding of his/her own career goals.
- Enlighten students of instruments and supplies used in oral health from the Dentist, Dental Hygienist and Dental Assistant perspective.
- Expose students to the administrative side of working in a CHC by talking administrative and clinical staff.

- Encourage students to return to the clinic for a rotation during dental school and a dental career after graduation.
- Maintain a relationship that enables the student to have a professional contact while attending dental school.

Expectations of health center dentists and directors were to guide and educate the students of the operations of the center. The students explored various clinic experiences including; patient interaction, instruments, front desk activities, and how the Medicaid adult dental benefit cut affects the clinic. The students who participated in the U of M curriculum, learned about the MOHC Mentorship Program during a presentation. Students were asked to apply by writing summaries of why they wanted to be mentored with a public health dentist. It was required the students be third and fourth year undergraduates. Applicants were also asked to demonstrate their knowledge of Medicaid and underserved populations by answering four survey questions in an essay format. The questions asked why they wanted to become a dentist; why they are interested in the MOHC Mentorship Program; where they envision practicing once they graduate, and what their perceptions were of the Medicaid system. The objective of the application was to gauge the seriousness of the student's intentions in participating and to determine if the student's concept of underserved and uninsured populations would change after mentoring in the program. Five Federally Qualified Health Centers participated in the program and accepted the pre-dental students for one week session. Seven students applied for the program and were placed in the following clinics:

- Alcona Health Centers (Dental Clinic, Oscoda, MI)
- Baldwin Family Health (Baldwin, MI)
- Center for Family Health (Jackson, MI)
- Hackley Community Care (Muskegon, MI)
- Muskegon Family Care, (Muskegon, MI)

The students were allowed to select their most desired center in which to spend a week. This allowance was to accommodate the students' travel expenses since they were responsible for food and housing. Most selected centers that were either close to home, or close to a relative. Baldwin Family Health was not selected due to its location and student needs. The health centers were asked if they would be willing to take more than one student (on different weeks) and if they were willing to participate in program guidelines as the handbook suggested. A conference call with all health center contacts confirmed the program details. As students applied and selections were made, the centers were contacted with the name of their student(s). Upon arrival, students were sent a checklist to guide them through the week. The checklist not only assisted the student in what questions to ask, but helped the dentists in learning opportunities.

Program Outcomes

A post-survey was sent to the seven applicants. The informal survey contained 15 questions. All seven pre-dental students completed the survey. The goal was to determine if the students were educated in patient care, dental instruments, professional advice, perceptions about Medicaid and other underserved patients and to determine if the Community Health Centers were educating the students the way the program requested. All seven students felt their learning expectations were met.

- When asked if their perception of public health changed after spending a week at the health center six students responded yes and one responded no
 - “My perception changed immensely. I was unaware of the sheer need of the health center.”
 - “Because of my previous experience in health clinics, my perception did not change overall.”
 - “The dentists I worked with had time to sit down with me and discuss the repercussions, both short and long term, of Medicaid cuts.”
- When asked if their perception of underserved populations changed, five students responded yes and two responded no.
 - “The majority of patients were extremely deserving and grateful.”
 - “I now see that the underserved population really has an immense need for dental attention.”
 - “I am fortunate to have been raised in a more well off area. Spending a week at the clinic changed my perception about underserved areas.
- Students were asked if the dentists offered any advice regarding decisions to enter dental school.
 - “The dentist really stressed making sure that your patients know that you care for them because you need them just as much as they need you.”
 - “Third year dental students were working in the clinic the week I was there – they offered a fresh perspective and gave lots of advice on the application process/interviewing.”

The students were also asked if they would want to apply for the program again or if the program needed any improvements. All of the students who were not graduating seniors felt they would apply next year or recommend a friend to apply. Upon completion of the program, each student received a completion certificate. (The certificate showed the program has value and will be a sign of dedication to their studies.)

Program Future

Two improvements stood out in the questionnaire from the students' perspective. One was to improve communication between the student, health center, and the MOHC. The time between the student getting assigned to a health center location in May and the week they were scheduled was for some, too long of a gap for updated communication. Some of the health centers needed reminders a student was coming, while some of the students did not contact the health center far enough in advance to prepare for their arrival. The second issue was that the students were hoping to *assist* the dentist or hygienist, however the program was written so that the students were to observe only. It was within the boundaries of MOHC Hold Harmless agreement that the students not take any risks that could harm them, the patients or the MOHC. After discussion with the clinicians, it was determined that risks would not be compromised when if students assisted.

Site visits were made to three out of four health centers by MOHC staff and all of the health center contacts were interviewed after the students completed their week. Opportunity to tour the health center and interview the dentists, director, and students was arranged. Each visit was as enthusiastic as the last. Many positive, encouraging comments were made. Dr. Jane Grover Dental Director for the Center for Family Health in Jackson, MI thanked MOHC for creating such an important program. She felt that the pre-dental student population was an excellent age group to target. It was clear in all three clinics that the dentists and other staff were happy to be a part of the program. The students' attitudes were equally as upbeat and excited. The most encouraging element to the visits was the effort clinic staff made to educate the students in every way possible. One of the students had been invited to sit in on a staff meeting. Another had time to learn how the recent cut to Medicaid adult dental affects the number of patients the clinic loses each week. One student expressed, "The experience was everything I was looking for. The director took time out of her busy schedule to sit down with me and answer my questions regarding costs of starting up a clinic and maintaining a staff...It was incredibly informative."

MOHC will look to continue the program with the intention of growing it. Long term goals are to increase the number of applicants and the number of Michigan Community Health Centers that want to be involved in increasing Michigan's dental workforce. Ultimately, a survey of students who have completed the program and pursued a career in public health will be studied.