Evaluation of the Long Term Care Oral Health Program

This fact sheet has been funded by the North Dakota Department of Health, Oral Health Program under dollars allocated by the DentaQuest Foundation.

An Aggregate Report: Three North Dakota Long Term Care Facilities

The Center for Rural Health (CRH) at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences was contracted by the North Dakota Department of Health Oral Health Program (DoH OHP) to complete pre/post assessments for long term care (LTC) facilities participating in a mobile oral health program. This evaluation was funded by the DentaQuest Foundation.

Three facilities participated in assessments in the spring of 2016 and the fall of 2017. The assessments sought to understand the barriers to providing oral health services in a LTC setting, while also evaluating the effectiveness of the LTC mobile oral health program. Participants included administrators, directors of nursing/unit charge nurses, and direct care staff. Facility names have been removed. If you would like more information or have a request for additional data points, please contact Dr. Shawnda Schroeder at shawnda.schroeder@med.und.edu.

Key Findings

In 2016, 238 surveys were completed among the three participating LTC facilities. In 2017, 189 surveys were completed. A majority of respondents in both years were certified nursing assistants (CNAs). A majority of respondents (71% in 2016 and 72% in 2017) were located at one of the three participating facilities.

- Between 2016 and 2017, there was very little variation in perceived impact of the program.
- In both 2016 and 2017, staff (97%) indicated that oral health was considered a priority of daily resident care.
- Overall, satisfaction with how oral hygiene needs of residents were being met within the facility increased slightly from 2016-2017; however, in 2016, 85% already indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied.
- During 2016 and 2017, dental care training was provided for LTC staff; however, respondents disagreed on the availability of oral hygiene training for residents.
- In both years, a large percentage of staff indicated they did not know who was responsible for the oral health assessment upon admission of a new resident. Of those who did respond, the unit charge nurse or registered nurse (RN) were identified most frequently; not a member of the dental team.
- The unit charge nurses and CNAs were the two providers identified as primarily responsible for the day-to-day coordination of a resident’s daily dental care plan during 2016 and 2017.
- A majority of respondents (86% in 2016, 84% in 2017) had not heard of the Smiles for Life curriculum provided at no cost by the North Dakota DoH OHP.

Access to Dental Care

Generally, a majority of respondents agreed that facility participation in the program improved dental care access for residents. However, during 2017 a smaller percentage of RNs and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) agreed there was improved access to care. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Percentage of LTC Providers who Agree/Strongly Agree Participation in the Program Improved Dental Access for LTC Residents: 2016-2017

- During 2016 and 2017, dental care training was provided for LTC staff; however, respondents disagreed on the availability of oral hygiene training for residents.
- In both years, a large percentage of staff indicated they did not know who was responsible for the oral health assessment upon admission of a new resident. Of those who did respond, the unit charge nurse or registered nurse (RN) were identified most frequently; not a member of the dental team.
- The unit charge nurses and CNAs were the two providers identified as primarily responsible for the day-to-day coordination of a resident's daily dental care plan during 2016 and 2017.
- A majority of respondents (86% in 2016, 84% in 2017) had not heard of the Smiles for Life curriculum provided at no cost by the North Dakota DoH OHP.
Although a majority of the staff were unaware as to whether their facility had a list of dental providers for resident referral, 95% of those who did respond indicated that a referral list was available in both 2016 and 2017. Both transportation and availability of suitable dental treatment space are cited as barriers to dental care access in the literature. However, they were not identified as moderate or serious barriers among those facilities participating in this mobile program.

### Oral Health Resources and Knowledge

Roughly 78% of staff in both 2016 and 2017 indicated their respective facilities offered oral health training for staff with an additional 10% stating it was available upon request. Conversely, only about 31% believed there were educational sessions available for residents on the importance of good oral health.

Although more than half of those surveyed in both years agreed or strongly agreed that the program led to beneficial resources for staff and residents and improved knowledge and awareness of oral health, the percentage of those in agreement declined from 2016 to 2017. See Figure 3.

### Providing Dental Care

In both years, staff indicated that the unit charge nurse or RN, not a member of the dental team, were the individuals primarily responsible for completing the oral health assessment upon admission of a new resident. Coordination of a resident’s daily oral healthcare plan was most commonly identified as the responsibility of the CNA or the unit charge nurse. However, 1/3 of CNAs surveyed indicated they did not know who was responsible for coordinating residents’ daily oral care plans. Recognizing that dental exams were being completed by nursing home providers, and not members of a dental team, and that there was lack of knowledge regarding who was responsible for coordinating daily oral care plans, the state DoH OHP funded the CRH to work with nursing home and dental stakeholders to develop a standard dental screening tool for nursing home residents. Implementation of this tool will foster dental and nursing home collaborations and improve the oral health of nursing home residents. The Standardized Dental Screening for New Nursing Home Residents: A Promising Practice Guide is available at ruralhealth.und.edu/what-we-do/oral-health/publications.