

Campus-Community Partnerships in Improving the Oral Health

Beth Crossman, Lexy Ellsworth, Leanne Ives, MJ Paynter, Emma Rees, Kaisha Sanchez, Bonnie Vining, Sarina von Sauer, Eastern Washington University
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Project & Goals

This project demonstrates a campus-community partnership between Eastern Washington University (EWU) dental hygiene students and the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program. In this project students partnered with SRHD and ESIT professionals to conduct a needs assessment related to oral health for this population. Based on the needs assessment students developed, implemented, and evaluated an oral health education program directed to Family Resource Coordinators (FRCs). The goal of the project is to develop an ongoing partnership whereby FRCs have access to current oral health messages and lesson plans to share with parents during home visits by the FRCs and home visiting nurses (HVs).

Background & Critical Issue

Given the multifactorial nature of the dental decay process and social determinants of health, dental decay prevention and management calls for an interprofessional approach. This is especially important for children with special health care needs (SHCNs). ESIT provides services to children three years of age who are suspected of having developmental delays, disabilities, or special needs. This partnership provides an opportunity for dental hygiene students to partner with ESIT professionals.

Partner Organization

The project was achieved through partnership with the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program. SRHD ESIT works with eligible families to assign an Early Intervention Service provider. A Family Resources coordinator (FRC) working at the provider location helps coordinate screenings and ensure comprehensive developmental evaluations are completed. FRCs use these results to determine eligibility and support families in accessing resources.

What We Did

As part of two EWU Dental Hygiene program courses in public health, we worked in student groups in partnership with Spokane community organizations in developing a program addressing a key problem related to oral health at the population level. Through the process of program planning, we engaged in assessment, diagnosis/prioritizing, planning, implementation, evaluation, and documentation. Over the course of two semesters, we partnered with SHRD ESIT professionals to develop an educational program for the FRCs on key oral health topics for infants and toddlers. This train-the-trainer approach provides FRCs with oral health lessons in a just-in-time approach to share with parents during home visits.

- Conducted a needs assessment with partners
- Prioritized oral health topic messages based on FRC focus group/survey
- Developed the first two FRC/home visitor lessons based on topic priority:
- Milestones, Cavity Prevention,
- Periodicity of Dental Visits
- Establishing a dental home
- Importance of Fluoride
- Oral Habits, Dental First Aid, Special Considerations (tube feeding, cleft lip/palate)
- FRCs provided feedback in lesson content.
- Created two lesson/modules in voice-over PowerPoint lessons/modules
- Lessons/modules are available to FRCs via the SHRD website and YouTube
- When the lessons were completed, we met with the Family Resource Coordinators (FRCs) via Zoom to present the final modules and to engage in dialogue on the outcomes of this initial work and the project.



ESIT Program

Early Support
for Infants
and Toddlers



What is Next

This academic year marks the third year of our partnership with SHRD in the EWU Dental Hygiene community projects. This spring, we will introduce the incoming senior class to our community partners. Fall semester, students and partners will meet to discuss outcomes from this year's project, and once again, engage in public health functions to assess, prioritize, develop and implement a program targeting an underserved population in the community.

In the past, student groups have partnered with SRHD in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, as well as other areas of oral health education and health promotion.

Our hope, as with the ESIT partners and Family Resource Coordinators is to develop a virtual library of oral health lessons/modules of these oral health topics that can be taken into the home to parents during home visiting sessions.

We hope to sustain our partnership whereby we, as dental hygiene students, introduce incoming senior dental hygiene students to the ESIT program as they continue with the family resource coordinators and home visiting nurse to develop a "library of oral health video training modules with timely oral health messages. As part of both our needs assessment and program evaluation, FRCs provided valuable input on the oral health topics and use of anticipatory guidance messaging for future video module content.

Contributing Themes

This project has contributed to Community Assets and Community Needs by addressing common considerations that new mothers may need to be prepared for as their infant transitions to childhood. We discuss milestones from birth to first tooth and first tooth to three years old. We discuss the benefits and risks of using a pacifier, along with that to do if your child has any oral versions. Our presentation also includes special considerations and what to do, such as tubing feeding, cleft lip, etc. Additionally, this project relates to Personal Values with how dental hygienists and our community partner values the well-being of our patients. We want to provide new mothers with resources to feel confident in caring for their child. This collaboration between dental hygienist students and our community partner was possible because of our devotion to our community.

Civic Perspective

Though this partnership, we were able to see first hand how public health serves the community, and why we often use the terms "community health" and "public health" interchangeably. This was an opportunity for us to see how we can serve our community through our profession. We now see the ways we can continue to partner with professionals and non-professionals as practicing dental hygienists.

