

Medical and Dental Health Care Providers: Collaboration for Optimal Health Outcomes



Oral health is an important part of overall health; this is especially true for Vermonters who have diabetes, coronary artery disease, cerebral vascular disease or who are pregnant. In fact, [recent research](#) identifies the promotion of oral health as an unexpected strategy for reducing health care costs and improving health outcomes. Good oral health is also an important aspect of cancer treatment; more than one-third of people treated for cancer develop complications that affect the mouth. These problems may interfere with cancer treatment and diminish the patient's quality of life.

In 2000 Surgeon General David Satcher referred to oral disease in America as a “silent epidemic”; unfortunately, we have not made great strides to closing the gap on oral disparities since then. Patients who are most at risk for oral disease have the least access to dental care (those of low socioeconomic status). This is important because Vermonters of low SES are also at greater risk for experiencing chronic disease; this is where you come in.

Oral disease is insidious, it often doesn't hurt until it has advanced to a serious degree. Your patients may not be aware that they have a slow burning fire of infection in their mouth that is making it more difficult for them to manage their chronic disease. Although the practices of medicine and dentistry have remained steadfastly separate, there are opportunities for integration. By bringing up the importance of oral health with patients, medical health care providers can help patients make informed decisions about accessing oral health care. Dental health care providers routinely do oral cancer screenings, and can be important referral sources for [802Quits](#), they can also support the importance of HPV vaccination, and can play an important role in a patient's cancer care team.

The National Institutes of Health publication series ["Oral Health, Cancer Care, and You"](#) informs both medical and dental health care providers and patients about steps they can take before, during and after cancer treatment to reduce the risk and impact of oral complications. The Society of Teachers of Family Medicine Group on Oral Health [Smiles for Life Oral Health Curriculum](#) is designed to provide educational resources to enhance the role of primary care clinicians in the promotion of oral health. Primary care practices are keenly positioned to help patients understand the linkages of oral health to systemic health, and a referral from a family physician to a dentist in the community can have a huge long term impact. Get ideas about how to integrate oral health into your system of care at www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/oral-health/resources

For more information about oral health in Vermont visit <http://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/oral-health/dental-and-general-health>