

The community practice program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, U.S.A.

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ABSTRACT – The Community Dentistry Department of the University of Michigan has coordinated a community practice program since fall 1971. The program provides a broad range of experiences, including work with penal institutions, a major hospital, homes for the retarded, rural and urban clinics, an institution training dental assistants, and a summer migrant program. The purpose of the third year field experiences is to allow dental students to observe the relationship of dental and other health problems to individuals and social groups in a community setting and to become familiar with factors affecting the distribution of dental disease. The senior year experiences afford students an opportunity to perform clinical dental procedures in a community health environment and to become aware of social, economic, political and cultural factors affecting dental health and dental practice. It has been found that combining clinically-related experiences with community-related experiences results in much higher student motivation and enthusiasm. All dental students are required to spend seven days on community practice during their junior and senior years. The school feels that these extramural experiences bring about an awareness of and interest in the many opportunities that exist for guiding a community toward better dental health.

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BACKGROUND

The Department of Community Dentistry has organized and coordinated the extramural community health programs at the University of Michigan for the past three years. This program, which is a required part of the curriculum, is known as Community Practice.

This program was initiated at the beginning of the 1971-72 school year with junior dental students. The approach at this time was to provide opportunities for students to be assigned to various community health agencies for observation and verbal interaction with members and patients at the agency. After a trial period of one term, students and some agencies expressed a desire to expand the program to include provisions for clinical participation by the students. During the second term, students were permitted to provide services such as examination, taking radiographs, diagnosis and treatment planning, and performing oral prophylaxis. The experiences during this term proved to be rewarding for

both students and agencies and established a firm foundation for expanding the program.

The program was designed to be initiated in two stages. The first stage took place with junior students. The following year both junior and senior dental students were included. It was decided that it would be more desirable to establish the program in two stages in order that the first senior class to participate would have had their initial community experience during their junior year. This also allowed the department to place seniors in agencies where they could provide a much broader range of services than they did during the junior year. Having been through the experience during the junior year, senior students are familiar with the agencies and can perform at a higher level of efficiency because the environment is familiar to them.

The primary purpose of the field experience during the third year is to allow junior dental students to observe in a community setting the relationship of dental and other health problems to individuals

and social groups as well as to become familiar with factors affecting the distribution of dental disease in populations.

The experiences in the senior year are designed to provide students with the opportunity to perform clinical dental procedures in a community health environment in order to give them an awareness of the related factors which affect dental health and dental practice, such as social, economic, political, cultural, and others. Assignments are involved primarily with the provision of care in community health agencies.

SCOPE OF PROGRAM

The program at present provides a broad range of experiences in which each student will be exposed to four different health agencies spanning both the junior and senior years.

As alluded to earlier, the experiences during the first term in the junior year are geared toward orienting the students to health and other related activities outside of the dental school through observation and verbal interaction at the facility where assigned. On any given day, with the exception of Wednesday, four to six students in the junior class are assigned to an agency in groups of two. They spend the morning and afternoon at this assignment and return to the school for a seminar session with members of the Community Dentistry staff and with the other students that were on assignment that day. The students share their overall impressions of the agencies. Since most students do not get the opportunity to be assigned to each of the agencies that we are presently utilizing, sharing their experiences allows them to be exposed vicariously to the other agencies. Each student in the junior class is assigned to one of the field experiences during the first term.

Students are assigned to another agency on a similar basis during the second term. The second term allows the students to incorporate some minimal clinical experience.

During the senior year, students are assigned to community practice for five days. One day is spent at a field assignment during the summer between the junior and senior years. Each student is assigned to a community health agency for two consecutive days during both the fall and winter terms for a total of four days. Taking into consideration suggestions made by students that the experiences can give

them a greater feeling of involvement if clinically-related activities beyond those performed in the junior year were allowed, seniors are permitted to do most clinical procedures that can be performed during any given day of an assignment.

Although clinical involvement with patients is not one of the primary goals of the department, we feel that student motivation and enthusiasm toward participation in extramural experiences are much higher with clinical involvement. In fact, it has been found among our students that combining clinically-related experiences with community-related experiences is essential in putting into better perspective the skills and knowledge which the student learns in both of these areas while in school.

At the present time, the Community Practice Program experiences involve eight agencies that are providers of health care or a dental program has been set up within their facilities with the assistance of the Community Dentistry Department. The eight agencies that both junior and senior students are assigned to are:

1. *Cassidy Lake Technical School*. This is an institution that is part of the State of Michigan's penal system. Cassidy Lake is an innovative approach toward prison reform. Young men between the ages of 17 and 20 who have committed criminal acts that are not severe enough to place them behind bars are assigned to this school to learn a skill. Dental care is available to these young men once a week through the penal system, but their needs are much greater than the one day per week availability of the dentist. Dental care is provided to this population through the Community Practice Program two days per week. This type of experience gives the students some insight into the dental needs of those who are confined to prisons and also gives students the opportunity to do something about the problem.

2. *Milan Correctional Institution*. Students are assigned to this institution which is part of the Federal penal system. Although Milan has a full-time dentist, the backlog of those needing care is so great that utilizing the services of dental students has been an added asset. This assignment provides an experience similar to that of Cassidy Lake Technical School and also serves to allay the students' apprehensions and reservations and encourages them to consider using some of their time to provide care in situations such as this upon completion of their dental education.

3. *Wayne County General Hospital.* This field experience is primarily for junior students because the activities are mainly restricted to observation and verbal interaction with the staff and patient. Assigning students to this experience allows them to view a dental clinic functioning as an integral part of a major hospital. It also provides them with the opportunity to see a comprehensive dental health program that is oriented toward meeting the needs of lower socioeconomic people who otherwise would not receive this type of care. This dental clinic is part of one of the major hospitals in the State of Michigan and is probably one of the most impressive in this country.

4. *Washtenaw Community College.* This experience is unique in that it provides junior dental students with the opportunity to draw on previous learnings to assist in training dental assistant students. Students assigned to this experience perform dental procedures such as examination, diagnosis and treatment planning, oral prophylaxis and on some occasions simple restorations. Performing these procedures allows dental assistant students to go through training associated with carrying out the aforementioned dental procedures. This experience helps the dental student gain a perspective into how he can assist programs such as this one that could very well be a part of his community.

5. *Model Cities.* This experience involves observation and verbal interaction with the staff and patients for junior students. Model Cities provides the students with the opportunity to see and assess a health facility that operates on the philosophy of consumer control. It also allows the students to take a look at the services provided by such a clinic, the people served, the professional staff, and furthermore gives them some basis for forming their own opinions about such a program.

6. *Sumpter Health Center.* This health center is a rural clinic that provides both medical and dental care to children from preschool age through adolescence. Junior dental students assigned to this experience perform routine dental procedures such as extraction (primary teeth), taking radiographs, simple amalgam and composite restorations, examinations and oral prophylaxis. Through this experience students gain some insight into the dental problems of a rural population and interact with the population in its own community environment.

7. *Saint Louis Boys School for the Retarded.* The

Department of Community Dentistry set up and staff this clinic. Approximately 60 trainable children are recipients of dental care provided by senior dental students. The first year this program was initiated only dental hygiene students were involved in cleaning the teeth of these children and teaching them oral hygiene procedures. Dental students came in the second year to provide mostly restorative and emergency care to this population. Portable dental equipment is used in setting up this clinic. In this experience students provide a needed service to this population and also get some exposure to treating handicapped children.

8. *Summer Migrant Program.* During the summer term of 1973, the Community Practice Program was expanded to provide dental care for migrant workers in the southeastern section of the State of Michigan. The efforts in this program were consolidated with both the School of Medicine and the School of Social Work at Michigan State University in bringing medical and dental care to these people.

The objective of this program is to provide basic dental services to migrant fieldworkers and their families. At the time the program was set up, no dental care was available to this population due to the limited access they had to a dentist and the amount of time they had to spend working in the fields.

Because the program was designed to operate on a daytime basis, it was decided that the target population would involve the children in the Title I



Fig. 1. Migrant children with health coordinator entering mobile dental van to receive care.



Fig. 2. Sophomore dental student assisting senior dental student performing operative procedure on migrant child in mobile van.

Summer School program, which gave us immediate access to this population. The program initially was set up in a local church that offered their facilities to the clinic. Two or three weeks later, two mobile dental vans were brought in and set up at the school. Not only did this improve the facilities, but we were also able to provide more services with the addition of the vans.

Due to the overwhelming dental needs of the adults and the demanding work schedule that they had, it was necessary to establish an evening clinic to reach them. The program operated four days per week with five senior dental students providing the care daily. In addition to the four days, two nights per week were added to care for the adult population. Students who worked in the evenings, mostly members of the Taft Society, volunteered their time. Two faculty members were present at all times to provide supervision and assist the students when necessary.

Aside from the benefits which the migrants received from this program, it was quite obvious to the Department of Community Dentistry and the Dental School that the desires and efforts of the students were exceptionally high, and that they gained an awareness of the need for dental care in this population and the responsibility that the profession places upon them to provide that service. This experience is available only during the summer (see Figs. 1 - 2).

Over 250 junior and senior dental students are involved in the Community Practice Program. This program is an accepted part of the curriculum and

all students are required to rotate through these experiences during their last 2 years in dental school. The combined number of days required of all students in the program during the junior and senior years is seven.

Primarily two full-time faculty members are involved in the program. One member, who is a clinical instructor within the department, has the major responsibility of supervising the students when they are assigned to one of the agencies without a dentist. One dentist in each agency is appointed to the staff of the Community Dentistry Department to supervise students while they are assigned to their agency. Five dentists are presently holding appointed positions in the department to supervise students.

All the programs mentioned are self-supporting with the exception of Saint Louis Boys School. Funds used to coordinate the program come primarily from departmental monies.

Only the Migrant Program and the Saint Louis Boys School are without well established facilities. Facilities for providing dental care to the migrant population were situated in a local church and in two mobile vans. Saint Louis Boys School has a dental operatory set-up, but because the equipment is extremely old we are utilizing portable operatories provided by the Department of Community Dentistry at this site.

The past two and a half years have been very encouraging as related to the students' acceptance of this program. Most students are very enthusiastic about participating in the Community Practice Program. The Migrant Program has proven to be the most stimulating field experience that we have at the present time. All of the experiences that have been set up afford the students the opportunity to gain a sense of accomplishment and understanding of problems that they would never receive in a classroom situation. The program in Community Practice also requires faculty interest, time and effort in making it successful. The school feels that experiences outside the dental school, such as the ones mentioned, will bring about an awareness of the many opportunities that exist for guiding a community toward better dental health. At the same time, it is hoped that dental students will be motivated to become interested in initiating and actively participating in health programs beneficial to the communities in conjunction with setting up their practices after they have graduated.

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