

Oral Health Integration in Physician Assistant (PA) Education 2017



Anita Glicken, MSW; Hugh Silk, MD MPH,



National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health (NIOH)
Center for the Integration of Oral Health in Primary Care Training (CIPCOH)

Background

- Dental caries is the #1 childhood disease in the US.
- A contributing factor to poor OH is a lack of knowledge and attention to OH by non-dental providers.
- Steps to improve OH status of vulnerable and underserved populations include:
 - Expanding types of providers delivering OH care
 - Expanding use of integrated multidisciplinary teams
- In 2009, the NIOH supported national PA organizations to partner with PA and other interprofessional oral health champions to integrate OH into PA education and practice.

Objective

- To evaluate 2017 integration of oral health in PA education program curriculum, a longitudinal follow-up to 2008 and 2014 research

Methods

- A link to a web-based, 19-item survey was emailed to all US PA education program directors, including developing programs (N=244).
- Survey included pre-defined response options and open-ended questions soliciting broad narrative comments.
- Survey was fielded between February and May 2017.
- Data was analyzed using SPSS.
- Survey response rate was 42% of the eligible sample.
- Data presented below represents responses from those including OH curriculum (96% of all responders).

Findings

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Responding Programs (N=98)*

	N (%)
In what state/territory is your program located?	
Northeast	28 (32)
Midwest	23 (26)
South	24 (27)
West	14 (16)
What is the approximate size of the community in which your program is located?	
Less than 30,000	12 (13)
30,001 to 75,000	10 (11)
75,001 to 150,000	9 (10)
150,001 to 500,000	25 (28)
500,001 to 1 million	20 (22)
More than 1 million	15 (17)
For how many years has your program been accredited?	
1-2	15 (18)
3-5	18 (21)
6-10	6 (7)
11-15	4 (5)
>15	42 (49)

*Totals may be less than 98 due to sporadic missing data.

- Most program directors agreed (83%) that it is important for PA students to address patient basic oral health issues.
- Most agreed (65%) that upon graduation, learners are prepared to answer questions on the national certifying exam.
- Fewer (48%) were satisfied with the level of graduate oral health competence.
- Most common topics include: oral cancer risk assessment (97%), caries/cavities risks and causes (97%), urgent/emergent oral health issues (96%), medical conditions that impact oral health (93%) oral conditions that impact oral health (93%).

Findings

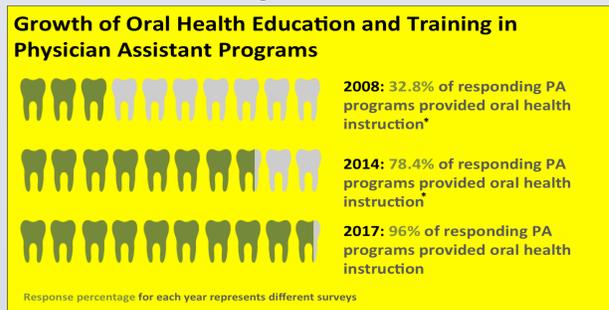
Table 2. Percent Distribution of PA Program Respondents Using "Smiles for Life" by Module Used to Instruct PA Students: 2014 Compared to 2017

Topics Covered in the Oral Health Curriculum	2017	2014	Test of Proportions Z score (p value)
	Percent of Programs		
Module 1: The Relationship of Oral to Systemic Health	52.0%	18.6%	-3.705 (<.001)
Module 2: Child Oral Health	52.0%	23.3%	-3.716 (<.001)
Module 3: Adult Oral Health	49.0%	11.6%	-4.216 (<.001)
Module 4: Acute Dental Problems	50.0%	9.3%	-4.594 (<.001)
Module 5: Oral Health and the Pregnant Patient	44.9%	7.0%	-4.398 (<.001)
Module 6: Caries Risk Assessment, Fluoride Varnish, and Counseling	50.0%	9.3%	-4.594 (<.001)
Module 7: The Oral Examination	51.0%	16.3%	-3.870 (<.001)
Module 8: Geriatric Oral Health	45.9%	9.3%	-4.264 (<.001)

Table 3. Evaluation Strategies Used by PA Programs to Evaluate Student Oral Health Knowledge and Skills

	N (%)
Written/computer testing	18 (81)
OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) or equivalent	16 (16)
Direct observation in a clinical setting	15 (15)
Review of clinical documentation	12 (12)
Simulation experiences	8 (8)
SFL completion certificate	2 (2)
We do not assess PA students on OH topics	9 (9)

Figure 1. Longitudinal Perspective of Growth in PA Program Oral Health Curriculum Integration



Conclusions

- Longitudinal data supports sustainability and growth.
- Stakeholder strategies appear to increase OH integration in PA education
 - Increase in the number of programs including OH content
 - Increase in the breadth of OH curriculum topics
- Compared to other non-dental health disciplines, PAs lead all in the number of hours of OH instruction.
- PA efforts support national policy calling for OH education for non-dental care providers, readying the health care providers to work in integrated care models where oral health is an essential component of whole person care.

* Langelier M, Glicken AD, Surdu S. Adoption of oral health curriculum by physician assistant programs. J Physician Assist Educ. 2015; 26(2): 60-69.

* Jacques PF, Snow C, Dowdle M, et al. Oral health curricula in physician assistant programs: a survey of physician assistant program directors. J Physician Assist Educ. 2010;21(2):22-30.