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Oral Health – One of the Culprits to Chronic Absenteeism

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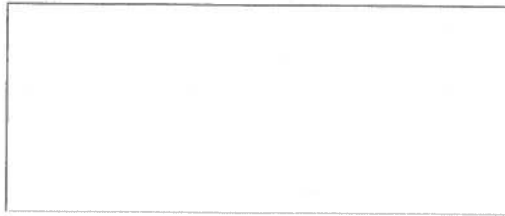
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Children who miss more than 10 percent or more of school days for any reason whether it be an excused or unexcused absence fall into the category of chronic absenteeism. When children become chronic



absentees their learning is obstructed, their academic standing is at risk and their chances of becoming a school dropout increases.

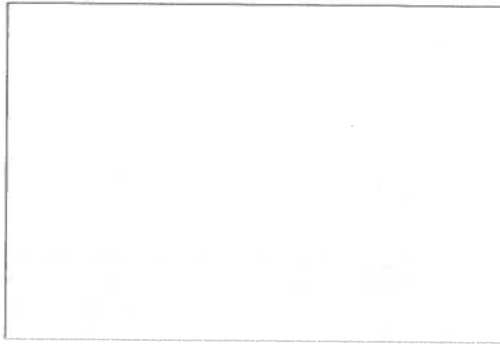
According to the Healthy Schools Campaign although causes for chronic absenteeism are multi-fold, one cause stands out as especially significant and that is student health. The campaign determined that there were five health-related causes that contribute to chronic absenteeism, oral health being one of them. The campaign also found that “children ages five to 17 miss nearly two million school days in a single year due to dental health problems.”

Of the dental health problems, cavities or tooth decay, are one of the most common chronic disease of children in the United States. Utah’s Oral Health Program (OHP) found that “the prevalence of dental caries occurs four times more than asthma and seven times more than hay fever.” The report, *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*, calls oral health issues the silent epidemic hitting American children hard.

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “About 1 of 5 (20%) children aged five to 11 years have at least one untreated decayed tooth, one of seven (13%) adolescents aged 12 to 19 years have at least one untreated decayed tooth and children aged five to 19 years from low-income families are twice as likely (25%) to have cavities, compared with children from higher-income households (11%).”

Between 2015 and 2016 Utah’s OHP conducted a comprehensive statewide dental screening survey of students, grades one to four, in elementary schools to measure the extent of untreated tooth decay, caries experience, the prevalence of dental sealants, and the need for dental care. The survey found that “one in five (19 percent) children had untreated dental decay ...

[and] left untreated...[caused] absenteeism from school [among other things]. The survey also found that “nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of children were identified as needing immediate dental care with about two percent (1.5 percent) needing urgent care due to pain and infection.” In addition, “nearly one in six (18 percent) children still lacks dental insurance coverage” which directly causes those children to “have poorer oral health and less access to care.”



Multiple studies have concluded that good oral health, starting at a young age, leads to better health later in life. So, how do we stop this “silent epidemic” from impacting our children? Utah’s OHP survey concluded that there are several strategies that could be implemented to improve the oral health of children in Utah which include:

- Increase access to dental insurance and care
- Enhance the public’s understanding of the importance of oral health and its benefits to overall health and quality of life
- Improve coverage by educating families about CHIP, Medicaid, and other dental insurance
- Expand access to community water fluoridation
- Expand school-based caries prevention activities such as fluoride varnish programs and sealants in elementary schools
- Provide better incentives and reimbursements to dental practitioners who see low-income individuals
- Focus on closing the dental care access gap by increasing awareness of existing community resources.

The Healthy Schools Campaign found that “Community-based oral health

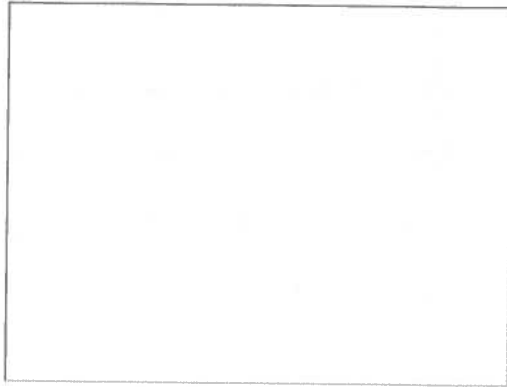
programs that target dental sealants, preventative services and restorative services could greatly reduce school absenteeism. Preventative services make it easier to manage dental issues before they become a larger health problem, and cause greater negative effects.”

Roseman University's College of Dental Medicine is attacking this silent epidemic head-on and has been implementing many of the above listed strategies.

Each year Roseman University hosts two large events that are free to the public. One is part of a national event called Give Kids a Smile, which is put on by the American Dental Association (ADA) and the other event is Roseman's very own Back to School Brush-Up™, which was born out of a desire for the University to decrease the amount of school children miss due to oral health pain. At each of these events Roseman dental students, faculty and staff provide free dental screenings and cleanings to children 18 and under. Those in attendance receive oral health education/information (OHI) and a voucher to return to Roseman Dental for a free comprehensive exam, free x-rays and up to \$50 in additional care.

“The goal of these two events is two-fold: first, to provide a positive dental experience for these children and make them life-long dental patients without the fear of going to a dentist and second, to raise awareness to the media and to the community of the unmet oral health needs of children in the local population,” said Frank Licari, Roseman University College of Dental Medicine Dean.

This year's Back to School Brush-Up™ is August 9th from 9am to 4pm at Roseman Dental, the clinical practice of Roseman University's College of Dental Medicine. At last year's event, Roseman successfully treated 471 children. Of those 471 children, 67.5 percent did not have dental insurance coverage and 68.2 percent did not have a regular dentist. Over the 2017-2018 academic year Roseman University also provided more than



\$250,000 in uncompensated dental care and provided more than 800 children ages 18 and under with free dental screenings and cleanings at various events.

In addition to the above large events, Roseman students also immerse themselves in the community and provide oral health education to children and adults at various events and organizations including elementary schools and the Boys and Girls Club.

With the concern of access to dental insurance and the data that shows that lack of access to dental insurance increases the probability of bad oral health, Roseman created the Roseman Dental Membership Plan. This plan is provided as a service to our patients without dental insurance.

Membership is available for individuals and additional family members. This membership plan can be used at Roseman University, South Jordan student and resident dental clinics only. Members receive all diagnostic services, radiology and preventive services at 100% discount. All other services discounted on the plan are provided at a 20% reduction of our usual fee. Since the inception of the Dental Membership Plan, Roseman has had over 1000 people sign-up for the plan.

This silent epidemic which is causing students to become chronic absentees from school is a large challenge. It will take a lot of hard work to combat this issue, but through our combined efforts in the communities we serve, oral health will improve among our children. It takes a village to raise our children, and Roseman is part of that village.

Author

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