

Community Health Advisor Model Effective in Oral Health Settings

New Law

AB 667 (Block, San Diego), passed and signed in 2009, and codified as Health and Safety Code Section 104762, allows any person under the general direction and protocol of a dentist or physician, to apply topical fluoride as part of a school-based or other public health program.

CHA Model

To determine the feasibility and efficacy of using a trained community health worker to apply fluoride varnish to children in a school-based setting, the Anderson Center for Dental Care in the Center for Healthier Communities at Rady Children's Hospital developed and tested a "Community Health Advisor" (CHA) model, including a written protocol and training module. The assumption was that this could greatly reduce the cost of providing fluoride varnish in the dental office or community clinic, as well as the cost of using licensed personnel for a school-based delivery program. The CHA model will also increase awareness and access to care. Anderson Center was the first organization state-wide to develop a model related to the new law.

Testing the Model

CHAs were chosen from among parent volunteers at two elementary schools that indicated a desire to participate in this program. CHAs received training in:

Oral health basics	Fluoride varnish
◇ What causes cavities	◇ What it is
◇ How to prevent cavities	◇ How it works
◇ Why teeth, even "baby" teeth, are important	◇ Why it is important
	◇ How to apply it

In-school "clinics" were scheduled for children in pre-school-1st grade to receive age-appropriate oral health education and brushing instruction; a new toothbrush; a basic oral health assessment by a licensed professional; and topical fluoride application by a CHA.

Results

Debriefing and clinic assessments indicated:

- CHAs did an excellent job of applying the varnish with little oversight.
- CHAs were proud and felt a sense of accomplishment.
- CHAs were excited about being mentors, teaching other CHAs about applying fluoride varnish and sharing their oral health knowledge with others in the community.
- From one clinic to the next, CHAs talked with other parents in the community, and increased the return of permission slips and thus the number of children receiving care.

The Numbers

March Clinics

4 CHAs
4 clinics
321 children

June Clinics

6 CHAs
4 clinics
522 children

- ◆ Stipend for 6 CHAs, 5-hour clinic = \$150
- ◆ Average salary + benefits for 3 RDAs, 5-hour clinic = \$570

- One CHA indicated an interest in pursuing further training as a potential career opportunity. CHAs are capable of applying fluoride varnish with appropriate training and oversight; and of conducting educational sessions with students and parents, both formally and individually. They are a great resource. Both the direct benefits to a fluoride varnish program, and the personal benefits for the CHAs, are valuable.

Conclusion

The CHA model is a cost-effective and efficient way to provide the proven benefits of fluoride varnish in school-based settings. This model, in the form of a comprehensive manual, has been shared with oral health groups state-wide. Further local expansion and testing is planned.

For more information, contact Susan Lovelace, Program Manager, slovelace@rchsd.or, 858-576-1700, ext. 3745 or Cheri Fidler, CHC Director, cfidler@rchsd.or, ext. 4389