

ADA American Dental Association®

ADA Launches Community Dental Health Coordinator Pilot Program at Temple University

CHICAGO, Nov. 24, 2009-The American Dental Association (ADA) has signed an agreement with Temple University to train new dental team members as part of a pilot program to improve the oral health in underserved communities.

The Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC) is a member of the dental health team who works in communities where residents have limited access to dental care to improve their oral health.

The CDHC provides a limited range of preventive dental care services-including screenings and fluoride treatments. However, of greater importance to these communities, the CDHC will help patients navigate the health system and access care by a dentist or an appropriate clinic and engage in educational activities to improve community members' oral health habits.

Temple will recruit and train CDHCs from urban locations in Philadelphia over the next two years, returning them to their communities to work as dental team members under the supervision of dentists.

Although the CDHC is a new dental team member whose merits are not yet known, many studies of the community health worker (CHW) model indicate that they can make significant contributions to a community. Because the CDHC will function much like a CHW, the ADA believes that they, too, will have a positive impact on the oral health of their communities through education and outreach.

"We are delighted to welcome Temple's participation," said ADA President Dr. Ron Tankersley. "The pilot at Temple will help us understand the effectiveness of a dental health coordinator in underserved urban settings."

Dr. Amid Ismail, dean of Temple University's Kornberg School of Dentistry and one of the architects of the CDHC program, explained why the program is seeking to place CDHC trainees in their own communities.

"Our aim is to ensure that the coordinator is able to bridge the gap between local cultures and health care systems. The CDHC can help improve people's oral health habits and help patients navigate the social and bureaucratic barriers that prevent them from gaining access to available dental health services," Dr. Ismail said.

Temple is the third of three pilot CDHC program sites. Two other pilot programs are directed by University of Oklahoma, which is training CDHCs from rural areas, and the University of California at Los Angeles, which, in conjunction with Salish Kootenai College in Montana, is training students from American Indian communities.

The ADA has funded the program, which will train six students per site each year.