

January 29, 2013

To: House Health and Human Services Committee

From: Suzanne Wikle, Kansas Dental Project

Chairman Crum and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Kansas Dental Project, which was formed in 2010 to provide a sustainable and systematic solution to the dental workforce shortage in Kansas.

Kansans across the state struggle to access dental care and without a sustainable and systematic solution, this struggle will continue and worsen. Our safety-net system in Kansas provided services to more than 71,000 dental patients last year and dental problems accounted for at least 17,500 emergency room visits in Kansas in 2010. Dental decay remains the number one chronic childhood illness, and a recent report by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment shows that in our nursing facilities for elderly Kansans, more than one-third of residents have untreated dental decay. The average age of dentists in Kansas is nearing retirement and 90 percent of our counties have received a workforce shortage designation. With a safety-net system at capacity, too many ER visits for dental pain and the level of unmet need in Kansas, it is evident that we need a solution that will work long-term in Kansas.

The situation that Kansas faces is critical, but it is fixable. The Kansas Dental Project proposes a solution that will address the dental access problems in Kansas by creating jobs, growing businesses and using state dollars most efficiently to serve uninsured and KanCare-insured populations – all at no cost to the state. Our proposal is to create a mid-level dental provider, called a Registered Dental Practitioner, to expand the capacity of dental offices just as physician assistants and nurse practitioners have expanded the capacity of medical offices.

Registered Dental Practitioners (RDPs) would be dental hygienists who go back to school to obtain advanced training to provide routine restorative dental care – such as fillings, some extractions and denture repairs and adjustments. Following their education, RDPs would be licensed by the Kansas Dental Board only after passing a clinical examination – proving their ability to perform the procedures in their scope of practice.

Registered Dental Practitioners would always work under the supervision of a dentist, who ultimately controls which patients RDPs see, where RDPs practice and what procedures RDPs perform. It is the discretion of the supervising dentist as to whether they have RDPs work in the office with them or whether they allow their RDPs to work in community settings, such as nursing homes, senior living communities or schools, to provide care closer to home for those with the most significant transportation barriers.



The Kansas Dental Project is a collaborative effort by Kansas citizens, community leaders and health care professionals to address the dental workforce shortage in Kansas and improve access to dental care for Kansans in rural and underserved areas.

The Kansas Dental Project is spearheaded by:

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Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved
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Kansas Health Consumer Coalition
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Creates Jobs. Kansas has five dental hygiene schools but no dental school, which has resulted in an influx of dental hygienists and too many unemployed hygienists. Allowing hygienists an additional career path will not only create jobs, but it will also create more providers to address the overwhelming demand for dental care in Kansas. For each RDP added to an office, additional support and administrative jobs will also be added.

Business Friendly. Dental offices across the state have long waiting lists or are unable to accept new patients because they do not have the workforce to meet the demand. Adding Registered Dental Practitioners to the workforce allows more flexibility for those businesses to meet the needs of their patients and community. There are dentists in Kansas who want to incorporate Registered Dental Practitioners into their practices, but current law prohibits them from operating their businesses how they wish. Allowing dentists the option of adding Registered Dental Practitioners to their practices allows them as small-business owners to operate as they like, while also providing enhanced services to their patients.

Cost Efficiency. There are 17 dental clinics in Kansas that primarily serve uninsured, underinsured and persons insured through KanCare. More than 124,000 dental visits for more than 71,000 patients were provided in 2011 through our safety-net system. Medical clinics in Kansas are able to optimize their resources by employing mid-level providers - physician assistants and nurse practitioners. If they had a similar workforce option for dental services, their resources, including state dollars, would be able to serve more Kansans. It is estimated that an RDP added to a dental clinic would increase the efficiency of that position by 25 percent, meaning that more Kansans would be able to receive care.

With the addition of preventative dental benefits for adults on KanCare, increasing cost-efficiency in the Kansas safety-net clinics will be even more critical. Without finding a more cost-effective way to provide care, the success of the adult dental benefits is uncertain. Adding registered dental practitioners to the dental workforce is a critical step to ensuring access to care for adults, especially the elderly, insured by KanCare.

National Momentum. It is important to understand that this conversation is not unique to Kansas. In fact, it is happening across the country. With two states already utilizing mid-level dental providers and 18 others having this discussion, it is evident that states recognize how important it is to expand their dental workforce. Kansas is poised to be a national and regional leader and can benefit by educating students from other states and attracting dentists to Kansas that wish to incorporate mid-level providers into their practices.

The Kansas Dental Project looks forward to continued discussions in this committee about Registered Dental Practitioners. At no cost to the state we have an opportunity to increase care while also creating jobs and growing business. That's a Kansas solution.



Your Views

Let practitioners aid in dental care

Kansans think big. Big dreams, big ideas and big solutions. But when it comes to strengthening our economy and providing opportunities for future generations, we should think small. Small towns and rural areas of Kansas are a critical part of who we are. In many parts of Kansas, small businesses are the backbone of our communities.

Our dental practices in Great Bend, Hays and Pittsburg are perfect examples. Our small businesses employ 34 people and provide dental care to thousands of Kansans.

And still our businesses can't keep up with the growing need. Across the state, hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to oral health care because a gap in the dental workforce leaves 99 of our 105 counties without enough dental providers.

There is a solution, but government regulations are standing in the way.

Legislation proposed by the Kansas Dental Project would permit new dental providers called Registered

Dental Practitioners (RDPs) to work in our state. RDPs would allow us to see more patients and create critically needed jobs. Lawmakers can help by passing the RDP legislation, allowing us to hire more Kansans, expand our practices and provide care to more patients.

With RDPs as part of the dental care team, dental hygienists could obtain advanced education and training to provide routine and preventive care like cleanings, fillings and some extractions. They would pass a comprehensive clinical exam and be hired and supervised by dentists, who could then have more time to put their education to work on more complicated procedures. This system has already worked in the medical field between physicians and nurse practitioners and physician assistants. It's also already succeeding in the dental field in other states.

With RDPs, we could grow our small businesses and see thousands more patients each year. In fact, we estimate that hiring just one RDP would allow each of us to serve more patients by scheduling 2,000 to 3,000 more appoint-

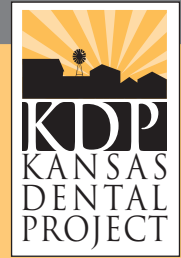
ments a year. That's a win-win for all Kansans.

Strengthening our dental workforce strengthens our communities. Communities with strong health care systems, good public schools and easily accessible services attract other small businesses, good employees and new employers.

Small businesses like ours are the economic engine of Kansas and we should encourage their growth, especially when they can provide much needed services to residents of the small towns and communities that have helped make Kansas what it is today.

Mid-level dental providers are already working in other states. How can we attract and keep dental providers in Kansas if we don't allow them the freedom to run their businesses as they see fit? How will we compete with other states when our potential for growth is stifled? If this legislation isn't passed, we can't.

DR. DAVID HART,
Great Bend
DR. MELINDA MINER,
Hays
and **DR. DANIEL
MINNIS,**
Pittsburg



Registered Dental Practitioners

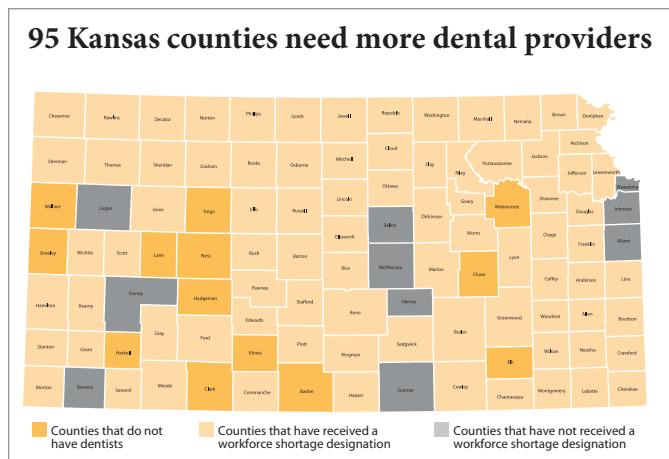
New jobs for Kansas

The Registered Dental Practitioner model is ideal for Kansas and its economy. By utilizing RDPs, we can grow businesses, ensure that families have access to regular dental care and save money.

The Kansas Dental Project is a joint effort by Kansas Action for Children, the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved and the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition to find a cost-effective, business-minded solution to the dental care problems Kansans face.

Why do we need Registered Dental Practitioners?

A gap in the dental work force leaves 95 of Kansas' 105 counties without enough dental providers, affecting rural and urban communities, businesses and families, regardless of where they live or if they are insured. Physician assistants and nurse practitioners have already helped address the medical work force shortage, and RDPs will do the same for the dental work force.



What is a Registered Dental Practitioner?

RDPs will be dental hygienists who obtain advanced education and training, pass a comprehensive clinical exam and work under a supervising dentist. They will provide routine and preventive care – like cleanings, fillings and some extractions, allowing dentists to focus on the more complicated procedures they are trained to do. RDPs will work in dental offices and community settings, such as nursing homes and schools. RDPs will always work under the direction of a dentist, even when providing care in community settings.

Other states – and 52 other countries – are addressing dental work force shortages by utilizing mid-level dental providers. Every study conducted on providers like RDPs shows they provide safe, quality care to patients.

Growing businesses

RDPs will allow dentists to grow their practices and treat more patients in an efficient and cost-effective manner. By employing just one RDP, a dental practice will be able to schedule 2,000 to 3,000 more appointments annually.

Businesses struggle to attract workers if their communities lack access to medical and dental providers. Implementing RDPs will increase access to dental care and ensure that Kansas has the necessary work force to care for its employees, making Kansas communities strong contenders for new businesses.

The RDP model will also benefit hygienists by giving them an opportunity to learn new skills and advance their careers. They will be trained right here in Kansas and work under supervising dentists. Allowing hygienists to expand their skill sets will benefit their careers, patients and the dental practices where they work.

Ensuring healthy Kansans

Hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to dental care. Untreated dental problems often lead to major medical problems, such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Vulnerable Kansans – senior citizens, people with disabilities and children – are particularly affected. For children, poor dental health leads to lifelong medical problems and can inhibit their ability to learn. Tooth decay is the No. 1 chronic childhood illness – five times more prevalent than asthma. By adding RDPs to the dental workforce, more adults and children will have reliable access to routine, preventive oral health care.

Providing cost-effective care

The dental work force shortage affects all Kansans, whether it's through higher costs for dental services, increased insurance premiums or the growing burden of uncompensated care on community hospitals and clinics.

In 2010, more than 17,500 emergency room visits were reported by Kansas hospitals for dental care – the No. 1 reason was cavities. Allowing RDPs to work in Kansas will help to lessen ER usage for dental care, reducing costs for patients and hospitals.

RDPs will be able to provide high-quality, cost-effective routine and preventive care and will cost less to educate and employ than a dentist. This is especially beneficial for Kansas' safety-net clinics, which will be able to utilize state dollars more efficiently.



Members of the Coalition

Supporting a new dental work force in Kansas

American Academy of Pediatrics, Kansas Chapter

American Association For Community
Dental Programs

Association of Community Mental Health Centers
of Kansas

Black Health Care Coalition of Kansas City

Children's Alliance of Kansas

Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO)

Communities in Schools of Kansas Inc.

Community Health Council of Wyandotte County

Cross-Lines Community Outreach Inc.

Disability Rights Center of Kansas

Dodge City Peaceful Tribe

Douglas County AIDS Project

Douglas County Community Health
Improvement Partnership

East Central Kansas Economic
Opportunity Corporation (ECKAN)

El Centro Inc.

Family Resource Center of Pittsburg

Finney County Community Health Coalition

Interhab

Kansas Action For Children

Kansas Advocates for Better Care

Kansas Area Agencies on Aging Association

Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved

Kansas Association of Community Action Programs

Kansas Association of Local Health Departments

Kansas Children's Service League

Kansas Dental Hygienists' Association

Kansas Farmers Union

Kansas Health Care Association

Kansas Health Consumer Coalition

Kansas Legislative Policy Group

Kansas Public Health Association

Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

Keys for Networking

LeadingAge Kansas

Medical Service Bureau

Mother and Child Health Coalition

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Kansas Chapter

National Association of Community Health Centers

Oral Health America

Oral Health Kansas

Partnership for Children

Statewide Independent Living Council of Kansas

Success By 6 Coalition of Douglas County

Thrive Allen County

Topeka Independent Living Resource Center

The Whole Person

Youthville