

Oral Health Education in Rural Colorado ^[1]

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The University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine has educated hundreds of dentists, yet there are oral health disparities in many of the rural counties of Colorado. Aside from access to care, information on oral health literacy and exposure to potential career opportunities in oral health care are often lacking in a rural high school curriculum. This curriculum would be difficult to develop at a local level as it is a subject area that many high school teachers are not prepared to teach. Compounding this problem is the fact that in some rural counties within Colorado there are no dentists ¹ who could be used as an educational resource. To address this problem I am proposing that by forming a lasting educational relationship between rural high school students, their teachers and the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine and its alumni, we can address this problem.

By providing curricular input on oral health and developing the dental professional community expertise to support its' presentation will in the short term:

1. Improve oral health literacy in the rural high school students, teachers and communities,
2. Increase the number of students from these rural communities who express an interest in dentistry as a career and seek admission to the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine. One third of the applicants to dental school make this career choice while in high school
3. Create a cooperative and consistent relationship between the university, state dental community and citizens of Colorado. In the long term this proposal will hopefully increase the number of CU Alumni who return to rural Colorado to care for their communities' oral health and mentor their youth. While this long term goal does not fit into the specific time frame of the research for the Teaching Scholars Program, it has the potential to be significant for the rural communities of Colorado. Nationally the recruitment of dentists into underserved areas is in a state of decline and it has been recommended that there needs to be a persistent diligence in the recruitment of students from these underserved areas

This project would:

1. Identify current students at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine who are from a rural environment and are interested in rural practice. From this group determine their high school educational experience and personal motivations to pursue dentistry as a career.
2. Determine the topics of interest of high school educators in selected rural communities.
3. Develop an outline of six 30 min to 1 hour presentations on topics related to oral health.
4. Train the teachers in the developed curriculum, 2nd through the 4th year dental students

who have the potential to return to these communities, the high school teachers, and community dentists.

5. Determine the current level of oral health awareness and the potential of dentistry as a career choice among the selected high school students
6. Integrate the topics into the high school student curriculum.
7. Determine the changes in the high school students increase in oral health awareness and the potential of dentistry as a career choice for these students.
8. Determine the sustainability of this program and evaluation of the long term goal of increasing the number of dentists in these rural counties.

Groups audience:

President's Teaching Scholars Program

Source URL:<https://www.cu.edu/ptsp/oral-health-education-rural-colorado>

Links

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