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### **Oral Health Cancer Screening for Older Adults: An Interprofessional Experiential Learning Experience**



**Background:** In recent years, a growing body of evidence between oral health and disease has spurred national initiatives to include oral health screening as part of the undergraduate learning experience. In the spring and fall of 2016, as part of an inter-professional collaboration effort with NYU College of Dentistry, an oral health cancer-screening event

transpired in selected community agency sites to provide nursing students with an opportunity to gain from an experiential learning and provide a much-needed screening for a geriatric population. An oral health cancer-screening event conducted by the nursing students with oversight by dental faculty followed the nursing students' health education presentation on oral health for older adults. Participants received vouchers for a free dental exam & a packet of oral health products. Pamphlets developed by the nursing students' specific to this population were distributed.

**Planning:** An inter-professional relationship between NYU Meyers College of Nursing and NYU College of Dentistry to offer oral health cancer screening events to seniors in community based clinical sites occurred over several meetings. A collaborative relationship with stakeholders in the community sites included agency directors, social workers and visiting nurses and these sites were already in place for undergraduate nursing student experiences. Dental faculty familiar with community outreach events provided consultation to the nursing students performing the oral health cancer screenings.

**Preparation:** Students completed oral health modules, watched videos on performing an oral exam and practiced oral exams the week prior to the scheduled event.

**Implications for Nursing Practice:** According to the 2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health, and two reports released by the Institute of Medicine in 2011 & 2014, health care professionals play an important role in advancing overall health through inclusion of oral health into practice. Nurses are the largest group of health care professionals in contact with clients of all ages. Integrating oral health training into undergraduate nursing education facilitates an increased awareness and skill sets to maintain in practice, regardless of the setting. Health promotion and illness prevention for oral health care is part of the Healthy People 2020 national initiatives placing nursing in a valuable role to advance oral health screening and teaching. Nursing students' shared that this experiential learning experience will help them to incorporate a more comprehensive oral examination in the future nursing practice.

**Translation to Acute Care Facilities:** Integration of an oral exam including teeth, gums, mucosa, tongue & palate exam (HEENOT) from the traditional HEENT (Head, ears, eyes, nose, & throat) into nursing assessments provides opportunity to provide education on the oral-systemic health connection. This is of particular importance with the increase incidence in

oropharyngeal cancer associated with the HPV virus and health care disparities related to lack of dental insurance and access to care. In addition to a favorable prognosis with early detection, disfigurement and sometimes-prohibitive reconstructive surgery is avoided. See resources below to integrate into nursing education in any setting.

### **Sample Oral Health On-line Modules Assignment**

1. Click on and Read this Blog Post Oral Health: An Essential Component of Whole Person Care @ <http://www.ohnep.org/news/new-blog-post-oral-health-essential-component-whole-person-care>

2. Follow this link to page entitled “Smiles for Life: A National Oral Health Curriculum”:  
<http://smilesforlifeoralhealth.org/buildcontent.aspx?tut=555&pagekey=62948&cbreceipt=0>

3. Click **Learn Online**

4. After clicking **Learn Online**, a page will open showing eight different courses. Below is the list of **four courses you are required to complete**:

Course 1: Relationship of oral and systemic health

Course 2: Child oral health

Course 7: The oral exam

Course 8: Geriatric oral health

5. Click on course

- A description of the course will be provided
- On the right side of the page click **Launch Course**
- Complete registration
- Complete course, post-test questions, evaluation, then **click Submit** to view the “Thank You” page where you have to option to print or save a Certificate of Completion.

6. **Print or save the Certificate of Completion for all four courses** and upload the Certificates of Completion to NYU Classes by the due date/time.

#### **Additional learning and resources:**

1. Download App: <http://smilesforlifeoralhealth.org/apps.html>

2. Stay connected: Join to receive the email newsletter, Oral Health Matters and for the latest OHNEP information: <http://ohnep.org/>

3. Healthy People 2020: Oral Health at <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/oral-health>

4. Institute of Medicine: Advancing oral health in America (2011)

<http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2011/Advancing-Oral-Health-in-America/Advancing%20Oral%20Health%202011%20Report%20Brief.pdf>