Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy Dual Licensure in Action

Master of Science in Advanced Dental Therapy (MSADT) alumni graduate as dual licensed practitioners with the capacity to provide patients with two scopes of practice: dental hygiene and dental therapy. Patients benefit from the knowledge and skills dental hygiene licensure provides in addressing the supporting oral soft tissue diseases, including professional emphasis on prevention and education. Dental hygiene students and licensed dental hygienists have benefitted from the efforts of MSADT Cohort 2 alumni, Jenny Berge, RDH, DT. As an employee of Apple Tree Dental in Rochester, Jenny has been working with underserved patients across the lifespan; she was also elected in August, 2013 as Component 5 Trustee of Minnesota Dental Hygienists’ Association (MnDHA) representing dental hygienists in eleven southeastern counties.

Jenny’s work at Apple Tree Dental provides preventative and restorative treatment for the patients served in the new clinic many of whom represent the rural areas surrounding Rochester. Jenny’s competent role in patient care allows dentists in the oral healthcare team to see patients requiring services outside of her dental hygiene and dental therapy scope of practice such as root canals, dentures, and extractions of permanent teeth. While in the past Jenny has seen patients from all age groups, she has begun to see more and more children scheduled for her care.

Jenny serves patients as a dental hygienist and a dental therapist while also providing leadership as a MnDHA Trustee. When asked how her work as a MnDHA Trustee complements her role as a dental therapist Jenny responded by saying, “My work does complement my role within the MnDHA. I try to educate others within my profession about dental therapy by discussing what’s new in dentistry in Minnesota. I share with other dental hygienists my new career path and educate them about it. By doing so I hope to get rid of the misconceptions and false beliefs that exist about the new dental team member. I share with others in my field how the new dual licensed practitioner actually works within the dental clinic. I hope to be a role model for other hygienists that are interested in advancing their careers and working with the underserved; those wanting to improve access to dental care and considering Metropolitan State’s ADT program.” Jenny credits her graduate educational experiences with providing the skills and confidence needed to be a leader in her dual licensed professional roles.

Community Dental Care Increases Access for Underserved

Community Dental Care (CDC) is a non-profit dental clinic providing oral care services to low-income and underserved communities in the Twin Cities and Rochester areas. The clinic was first opened in the Midway area in 1982 before other locations were added in subsequent years. CDC is a busy clinic with a large population to serve. In 2013, the clinic provided quality dentistry to 94,000 patients and this number is projected to increase in 2014. CDC has been a strong supporter of the Advanced Dental Therapy (ADT) Program at Metropolitan State University since its inception.

Dr. Vacharee Peterson is the CEO of CDC and the 2012 recipient of the Minnesota Dental Association’s Humanitarian Award. She believes that with the increase in the ability to delegate duties i.e. the expanded functions for dental assistants, hygienists, and the creation of the dental therapist programs, the underserved populations will be served at a higher capacity. Her vision for the future is to increase access to dental care for underserved populations.

Andi Jordan, Normandale Community College Dental Hygiene Program and Cohort 2 MSADT alumnus, is working with CDC utilizing her dual licensure as a dental hygienist and a dental therapist. She joins 175 staff members to help increase critical access to dental care. Andi was inspired to work with CDC because of the generous and accepting atmosphere of the clinic. “The dentists are very helpful and supportive of having a dental therapist on site and they embrace the role of someone who can take care of restorative needs,” she said.

According to Dr. Shivan Nelson, one of Andi’s collaborating dentists, “Andi’s previous experience as a dental hygienist is apparent as I watch her interaction with patients. I felt she was well prepared to treat patients. I believe dental therapists are going to become increasingly important in addressing access to care issues; especially as more dentists are willing to incorporate them into their practices.”

Did You Know?

- Congratulations to 3 MSADT Cohort 1 alumni who have certified as Advanced Dental Therapists by successfully completing the multiple-part Minnesota Board of Dentistry’s examination process! Minnesota now has a total of 6 certified Advanced Dental Therapists all of whom are Metropolitan State University graduates.

- Based upon comments received from Minnesota stakeholders, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) made major modifications to the proposed Accreditation Standards for Dental Therapy at the Winter Meeting in January, 2014. The new proposed standards are open for comment until December 1, 2014.

- The Minnesota Board of Dentistry and Department of Health published a joint report in January, 2014 to the Minnesota Legislature, Early Impacts of Dental Therapists in Minnesota. Early findings include: the new dental workforce team members have expanded the capacity of dental clinics to serve low income, uninsured, and underserved patients; dental clinics employing DTs/ADTs report high patient satisfaction; wait time and travel time has been reduced due to increased access.

- In collaboration with St. Paul’s Union Gospel Mission, MSADT students, faculty, and staff participated in “Give Kids A Smile” and “Project Homeless Connect” in early 2014. Nearly $70,000 in dental services were provided to vulnerable community members at these events which included participation by the full spectrum of dental team members.