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The Oral Health Workforce

Addressing Children's Oral Health in the New Millennium: Trends in the Dental Workforce

Elizabeth Mertz MA ... Wendy E. Mouradian MD, MS

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Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General (SGROH) and *National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health* outlined the need to increase the diversity, capacity, and flexibility of the dental workforce to reduce oral health disparities. This paper provides an update on dental workforce trends since the SGROH in the context of children's oral health needs. Major challenges remain to ensure a workforce that is adequate to address the needs of all children. The dentist-to-population ratio is declining while shortages of dentists continue in rural and underserved communities. The diversity of the dental workforce has only improved slightly, and the diversity of the pediatric population has increased substantially. More pediatric dentists have been trained, and dental educational programs are preparing students for practice in underserved areas, but the impact of these efforts on underserved children is uncertain. Other workforce developments with the potential to improve children's oral health include enhanced training in children's oral health for general dentists, expanded scope of practice for allied

dental health professionals, new dental practitioners including the dental health aid therapist, and increased engagement of pediatricians and other medical practitioners in children's oral health.

The evidence for increasing caries experience in young children points to the need for continued efforts to bolster the oral health workforce. However, workforce strategies alone will not be sufficient to change this situation. Requisite policy changes, educational efforts, and strong partnerships with communities will be needed to effect substantive changes in children's oral health.



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Key Words

dental workforce; pediatric oral health; workforce trends

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