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New Efforts in Grant County to Improve Children’s Oral Health

GRANT COUNTY — Children in Grant County now have more opportunities to receive preventive dental care as a result of new approaches being implemented by public health officials, dentists and health care providers.

One innovative approach is to involve Grant County health care providers in dental disease prevention. In the past two months, 13 Grant County health care providers and their staff were recently trained on how to provide oral health preventive services during well-child checkups. Typically a health care provider sees a child 11 times before the child turns three years old. Providing dental preventive services to very young children during well-child checkups aides in spotting potential problems early and provides an opportunity to share tips with parents about how to take care of their baby’s teeth and when necessary, recommend a referral to a dentist for follow-up care.

“This public/private partnership between public health, dentists and health care providers is an opportunity to improve the overall health of children by preventing dental disease before their first dental appointment,” said Wendy Brzezny, Oral Health Coordinator at the Grant County Health District. “Early dental disease prevention is simple and cost-effective,” she adds.

“Good oral health starts with baby teeth,” said Dr. Beaubien of Moses Lake Clinic Pediatrics. “Baby teeth are vital to help infants and toddlers learn to talk and eat solid foods – and help guide adult teeth into place. If your child’s mouth isn’t healthy, then your child is not going to be healthy,” she adds.

Involving health care providers in oral health builds on the success of another effort, Access to Baby Child Dentistry (ABCD), which was initiated in Grant County in October 2009. ABCD links Medicaid-eligible children (birth to age 6) with a dental home. In addition to children’s dental care, families receive oral health education and are encouraged to bring their kids in for oral health screenings by their first birthday. There have been over 400 children 0-5 years old enrolled in the programs since November 2009, with new referrals coming in every day.

The ABCD program operates in 32 of Washington’s 39 counties and has received national acclaim for its effectiveness. In Grant County, the program is a partnership of the Grant County Health District, local dentists, the state Medicaid program and Department of Health, University of Washington and Washington Dental Service (WDS) Foundation. WDS provides free continuing education training in dental disease prevention for primary care providers. More than 1,000 health care providers throughout the state have received the training.

Dental disease is the most common chronic childhood disease in the country. Although it is almost entirely preventable, children's dental disease has been on the rise in Washington State for the last decade. Most low-income children don't receive dental care even though it is covered by Medicaid. In Grant County there are more than 7,700 Medicaid-enrolled children under age six, but less than half (45.4 percent) of those children received dental care.

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About Grant County Health District

The mission of the Grant County Health District is to continually evaluate and improve the health of the people of Grant County by promoting health, preventing disease and injury, and protecting the natural and community environment.

About Washington Dental Service Foundation

Washington Dental Service (WDS) Foundation, a non-profit funded by Washington Dental Service – the leading dental benefits company in Washington State, is dedicated to significant, long-lasting improvements in the oral health, and overall health, of Washington's young children and seniors. WDS Foundation works to prevent oral diseases such as tooth decay and gum disease with a focus on children and seniors. For more information, visit

www.deltadentalwa.com/wdsfoundation/wdsfoundation.htm

About ABCD

The Access to Baby and Child Dentistry program has been recognized nationally as an innovative program and a "best practice," by a variety of organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, WK Kellogg Foundation, and the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors. The ABCD program received the prestigious "Heroes of Health Care" award in 2003 given annually by the Washington Health Foundation. For more information on ABCD, visit:

www.abcd-dental.org