

Building a Framework for Improving Oral Health: National Oral Health Conference

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The 65th annual meeting of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD) was held jointly for the third time with the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD). While the association-specific functions continued to appeal to members of the respective associations, joint sponsorship of the National Oral Health Conference attracted many nonmembers who will be instrumental in advancing public health efforts to improve oral health. In addition to dentists, dental hygienists, clinic and program managers, and health educators, attendees included Medicaid program managers, nurses, and even a few physicians.

For the third consecutive year, meeting attendance broke all records, with 501 registered attendees. We were off to a running start on Monday after a weekend of preconference sessions that included not only the usual business meetings of ASTDD, an AAPHD Executive Council meeting, and the final days of examinations of the American Board of Dental Public Health, but also a business meeting and symposium for the American Association of Community Dental Programs, a "Dentistry 101" workshop on terminology and concepts for nondental workers, a caucus of state Medicaid dental program managers and joint meeting with state dental directors, two grant-writing workshops (one for research, one for programs), and a meeting of public health dentists in the military.

Local arrangements chairperson Ms. Mary Foley ensured that we would remember that this meeting was held in New England by opening the conference with a stirring set of tunes from a Fife and Drum squad of 18th century patriots. ASTDD President Ms. Diane Brunson and AAPHD President Dr. Kim McFarland greeted attendees with warm welcomes, recognized honored guests from the Na-

tional Dental Association and American Dental Hygienists' Association, and provided highlights of accomplishments of their respective associations since our last meeting.

The overarching theme for the conference, "Building a Framework for Improving Oral Health," was drawn from a statement from the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health, which outlined key strategies that could bring many parties together to promote oral health. The first plenary sessions picked up on that theme, providing examples of how supportive public policies could be advanced state by state. Professor John McDonough of Brandeis University provided a model of the public policy process, validated by his experiences in the Massachusetts state legislature, and offered a framework for dissecting experiences in eight states that were presented by dental public health colleagues.

Other Day 1 sessions included panels on "Pregnancy Outcomes and Oral Health Services for Medicaid Populations," "Changing Behaviors to Put New Knowledge into Practice," and "School Oral Health and Medicaid Populations," and the first set of a total of 14 papers contributed for presentation at the meeting. Day 2 sessions included the American Board of Dental Public Health's Symposium addressing the "National Oral Health Plan as a Foundation for Building Collaboration." Speakers included Dr. James Bramson, executive director of the American Dental Association. Later, Ms. Ann Naber, president of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), moderated the ADHA Symposium on Diabetes and Oral Health. Panels addressing "Foundation Support for Oral Health Programs" and "Issues for Medicaid Nursing Home Residents" rounded out the day's presentations.

Ms. Judith Feinstein, assisted by Ms.

Nancy Martin, coordinated the contributions of 28 roundtable discussion leaders during lunch. Participants were glowing in their praise of this session, complaining only that there were too many excellent topics to choose from (and a bit too much noise from exuberant colleagues). In addition to straightforward discussions of specific programs, a wide range of topics included funding opportunities, skill building, and opportunities for research collaboration, while other discussion leaders sought advice on policy dilemmas, and AAPHD committee chairs spoke with members interested in working with them to advance specific initiatives. Later in the day, 38 posters were presented, including eight from student award winners. Dr. Kathryn Atchison chaired the committee that solicited and reviewed abstracts for the contributed papers for oral presentation and posters.

After a Fun Run/Walk organized by Candace and David Jones to loosen up muscles stiffened by the prior evening's dancing (more about that later), Day 3 opened with the session "Establishing Evidence-based Practice for Communities and Clinicians." This session illustrated a panel composition that was promoted many times during this meeting—incorporating the perspectives of researchers, research translators, and practitioners. This year we received many positive comments about sessions that covered subjects broadly enough to include both the scientific evidence regarding interventions and the practical and policy implications of those findings. The benefit of sessions that actively engage dental public health researchers, educators, and practitioners from AAPHD's broad membership in discussions to highlight their respective roles in advancing our issues has never been more apparent. Other sessions addressed "Oral

Health Surveillance," "State Oral Cancer Prevention Programs," and "Hot Picks," which included state political issues regarding use of amalgam, two Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initiatives, and a new RWJ Foundation grant program to states for improving access.

The awards luncheon was chaired by Dr. Rebecca King, past president of AAPHD, providing members the opportunity to recognize the important contributions of several individuals. Ms. Helen Doherty was awarded an honorary membership in AAPHD. Award recipients included Dr. Robert Weyant, who received the Special Merit Award, and Dr. Patricia Main, who received the Special Merit Award for Outstanding Achievement in Community Dentistry—International. The Distinguished Service Award was presented to Dr. Myron Allukian. Dr. Ron Romero, New Mexico state dental director, accepted the Public Service Award on behalf of Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), who was recognized for his success in including a section on oral health promotion and dental disease prevention in the Children's Health Act of 2000, and for his introduction of legislation authorizing many activities and programs to improve children's dental health. A new award, for Best Paper in the *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* for 2001, was made possible through the generous support of GC America, Inc. It was presented to Dr. Susan Griffin by *JPHD* editor Dr. Scott Tomar and Ms. Megan Megale of GC America, Inc.

Dr. Sena Narendran completed his first year of responsibility for the Student Merit Award program and made presentations to students whose names, papers, and nominators are provided elsewhere in this issue. The awards luncheon also provided an opportunity to put a spotlight on the Dental Public Health Foundation, which made great strides in 2001–02 toward establishing a plan for management and oversight. Dr. Joe Alderman announced that he had discussed with family members what kind of legacy would be most consistent with their values and had decided to bequeath \$1,000,000 of his estate to the Foundation for the Yarbrough Howard/Alderman Joseph Scholarship Fund. Later in the conference, members also attended ASTDD's award luncheon, with Ms. Diane

Brunson presiding, and heard from Assistant Surgeon General Dushanka Kleinman in her first address to AAPHD and ASTDD as chief dental officer of the US Public Health Service.

The American Dental Hygienists' Association cosponsored Monday's reception. In a precedent-setting gesture, Dr. Karen Denard Goldman, president of the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE), presented a SOPHE Presidential Citation to AAPHD recognizing public health dentistry for its application of health education principles and practices, the contributions that dental health specialists have made to the advancement of public health education, and honored the interdependence of our two public health professions. Dr. Goldman presented the presidents of AAPHD, ASTDD, and ADHA with small wooden turtles as a reminder that progress often comes only when we "stick our neck out," and all four presidents then pledged a commitment to further collaboration. Following this reception, the American Board of Dental Public Health held its annual business meeting dinner. Its president, Dr. Brian Burt, recognized those who recently attained diplomate status and presented pins to new diplomates who were in attendance.

The principal social event of the conference was an old-fashioned New England lobster and clam bake. Lobster-cracking skills of attendees ran the gamut, so almost everyone was either coaching or seeking advice from a dinner partner on how to extract edible portions from the skeleton. Dinner plates were filled with generous portions, and part-way through the dinner every spare inch of table top had a pile of spent clam shells or lobster parts. Then the fun really began. Entertainment was provided by the North Shore Acappella, who regaled the crowd with songs from the 1960s and 1970s. The enthusiastic participation of attendees in dancing and knowing all the words to sing along with the Acappella betrayed their age. An observer could not help but be struck by the substantial public health experience associated with this large cohort of members, as well as the great energy and stamina they displayed.

It takes many people to organize such a vibrant and full program. In addition to individuals noted earlier in this summary, gratitude must be of-

fered to Ms. Candace Jones, AAPHD vice-president, and Drs. Lewis Lampiris and Steven Geiermann as ASTDD conference co-chairpersons. In addition, Ms. Bev Isman coordinated the preconference workshops, and ASTDD Executive Director Dr. Dean Perkins collaborated regularly with Ms. Pam Tolson, the new AAPHD executive director, as we continued to improve policies necessary to execute our joint sponsorship of the conference.

The National Oral Health Conference continues to represent incredible value to participants, as reflected in approximately 150 nonmembers (but prospective members) who attended. This is possible because of generous sponsors, which include ASTDD's federal partners, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Corporate Partners making significant financial contributions to this effort were: Aseptico, Inc.; CDx Laboratories, Inc.; GC America, Inc.; Procter & Gamble; Software of Excellence; and Stone Pharmaceuticals, A Division of Medical Products Laboratories, Inc. Corporate exhibitors included Colgate Palmolive, Colagenex Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Dentsply Professional, DNTLworks Equipment Company, Nonprofit Warehouse, OMNII Oral Pharmaceuticals, OraPharma Incorporated, PDC Press, Specialized Care Company, and the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools. Other conference partners who contributed to the program and attraction of the conference by promoting it to their members or employees included: American Association of Community Dental Programs, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Indian Health Service, National Institutes of Health, and state Medicaid dental program managers and consultants.

Ms. Candace Jones and Dr. Jane A. Weintraub for AAPHD, and Drs. Stuart Lockwood and Steven Geiermann on behalf of ASTDD, are hard at work planning the 2003 meeting. Dr. Warren LeMay will be making local arrangements in Milwaukee, WI, where we will stay at the Hyatt Regency April 29–May 1, 2003. These colleagues welcome your ideas and offers of assistance.