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UCSF SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY RECEIVES \$2.4 MILLION GRANT TO STUDY TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAMS IN DENTAL OFFICES

Announcement of UCSF/Delta Dental collaboration coincides with Great American Smokeout

The University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School of Dentistry, in collaboration with one of the nation's largest dental benefits administrators, announced today its award of a federally sponsored, \$2.4 million, five-year grant to research ways for dentists to treat tobacco dependence.

The grant, from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research and the National Institute on Drug Abuse, will allow UCSF researchers to study alternative ways for dentists to assess and treat tobacco addiction. The affiliated Delta Dental Plans in California and Pennsylvania will assist researchers with data collection and the identification of dental offices to be approached for inclusion in the study.

UCSF researchers timed their announcement of winning the grant to coincide with the designation of Thursday, November 20th as Great American Smokeout Day, when awareness of tobacco dependence should be at its highest.

"In addition to increasing risk of heart disease, lung disease, cancer, and other illnesses, tobacco use is associated with 75 percent of all squamous cell oral cancers and 50 percent of adult periodontitis cases in the nation," said Dr. Margaret M. Walsh, RDH, EdD, Professor in the department of Preventive and Restorative Dental Sciences at UCSF, and principal investigator of the five-year study. "Tobacco use also significantly predicts failure of periodontal therapy and dental implants, impairs oral wound healing, increases the risk of dental caries, and affects a wide range of oral soft tissue changes," Walsh explained.

Walsh has conducted extensive research in the field of tobacco cessation with particular emphasis on ways to support dentists and dental hygienists in the use of oral cancer screenings as a "teachable moment" to deliver tobacco cessation interventions.

The UCSF researchers will train selected dentists, who are members of Delta Dental's extensive networks, to provide tobacco cessation counseling in the dental office and provide funds to pay some of the dentists for their services. This study will evaluate the effect of various types of dentist training programs, and how insurance reimbursement might impact the number of patients that receive tobacco cessation counseling in the dental setting. Findings will be compared to a "usual care" control group of dentists that receive no training or reimbursement.

(more)

Studies have confirmed that about 10 percent of patients who are advised to quit tobacco use by healthcare providers do so. Walsh states that “because half of the 46 million adult smokers in the U.S. see a dentist each year, dental professionals are well positioned to counsel individuals and offer a number of effective resources for quitting tobacco use.

“Given that about one third of all smokers die prematurely, we think reaching that 10 percent in the dental office could translate into 600,000 premature deaths avoided,” said Walsh.

Marilynn Belek, DMD, senior vice president and chief dental officer for Delta Dental, said the company looks forward to collaborating on the project.

“We are very interested to see if dental benefit reimbursement for tobacco cessation intervention can play a role in reducing smoking levels among dental patients, while lowering the costs associated with periodontal disease and other tobacco-related dental problems,” said Dr. Belek. “If effective, it is conceivable that group benefit sponsors would be very interested in incorporating tobacco cessation benefits as part of a dental benefits program.”

Key collaborators on the grant include Dr. Steven Silverstein, DMD, MPH, UCSF Professor; Dr. Jane Weintraub, DDS, MPH, UCSF Professor; Dr. James Ellison, DDS, MPH, UCSF Assistant Professor; Dr. Umo Isong, DDS, PhD, UCSF Assistant Professor; and Dr. Stuart Gansky, DrPH, UCSF Assistant Professor; all from the Department of Preventive and Restorative Dental Sciences.

The UCSF School of Dentistry was established as the College of Dentistry by the Regents of the University of California on September 7, 1881. Professional programs currently offered by the school include a four-year program that leads to the Doctor of Dental Surgery degree; a two-year program that leads to the Bachelor of Science degree in dental hygiene; and postgraduate programs in advanced general dentistry, dental public health, endodontics, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontology, prosthodontics, and a general practice residency. For more information, log on to <http://dentistry.ucsf.edu/>.

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