

Making a Difference in Nursing Homes Through Oral Health

Nursing Home Train-the-Trainer Approach. The Civil Monetary Penalty (CMP) Oral Health project improves daily oral hygiene to improve the oral health-related conditions among Oklahoma and Texas nursing home residents. Interventions have shown that improvement in daily oral hygiene leads to positive outcomes, such as reduced emergency room visits, incidence of oral infections and chronic diseases, such as pneumonia. Under this project, registered dental hygienists provided TMF Health Quality Institute's comprehensive oral health toolkit and comprehensive staff training at 40 nursing homes in Oklahoma and 120 nursing homes in Texas. The toolkits included educational materials for nursing home residents and their families, including instructions for how to brush and care for natural teeth and gums. To evaluate the effectiveness of the toolkit and staff training, the dental hygienists administered baseline and post-program assessments, including the Basic Screening Survey for oral health, used to determine improvements in resident oral hygiene and incidence of oral infections and related conditions.

Thus far, participating nursing homes in Oklahoma have seen a 50 percent increase in the use of floss or interdental cleaning aids, a 24 percent increase in conducting daily screenings and an overall 30 percent gain in knowledge from pre- and post-training assessments. In Texas, residents performing oral care by themselves or assisted twice daily increased by 27 percent, and nursing home staff reported an overall 32 percent gain in knowledge from pre- and post-training assessments.

TMF also recruited oral health stakeholders for an Older Adult Workgroup to promote awareness of senior oral health. Feedback from the workgroup will be used to develop a sustainability plan at the project's conclusion.

Intervention Beyond the Nursing Home. An unexpected outcome of the CMP Oral Health project is the positive feedback received from nursing home staff in relation to how TMF's education bettered the personal oral care of the nursing homes' Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) and their family members. Attendees of an oral health training at a nursing home in Houston said, "[Attendees] all learned so much from this in-service... Many [attendees] actually checked their own mouths during the training." One person stated that they were "very grateful for TMF coming in and will be better prepared for not just the residents' oral care, but their own and their children's." A CNA in San Antonio said that she "love[d] learning about how to better care for my residents' mouths, and I'm also able to take this [training] home to my family and myself."

A TMF trainer in Oklahoma reported that a CNA asked her if a toothache could be the source of continuous pain and physical illness that she was experiencing. The TMF trainer suggested that she had an abscessed tooth and that she visit a dentist as soon as possible. When the trainer returned for additional training, the nursing home staff member could not wait to share that her trip to the dentist had made her well. She had suffered for a long time with an abscessed tooth that had created a fistula that was spreading infection throughout her body, and she was so grateful for the recommendation and oral health training.

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