

ASSESSMENT AND PREVENTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES BY PHYSICIANS- A CME PRESENTATION

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is defined as the presence of one or more decayed, missing or filled tooth surfaces in any primary tooth in a child between birth and 71 months. ECC is a significant national and local problem. Numerous reports document the severity and extent of ECC; moreover, there is evidence that ECC is increasing in the US population. In Florida, less than 12% of Medicaid eligible children under age 6 years receive any preventive or restorative dental services. In addition, less than 10% of Florida dentists participate in the state Medicaid program. The unfortunate combination of large numbers of at-risk children and small numbers of available dentists creates a crisis of need.

The good news is that early prevention services for Medicaid recipients improves their oral health and lowers long term costs. Other studies have demonstrated the benefits of fluoride varnish in reducing ECC, a key strategy of this proposal. One way to reach these underserved children is to encourage physicians to provide limited oral health services. The American Academies of Pediatrics and Family Physicians both endorse the provision of oral health services by physicians and at this time, 17 state Medicaid systems reimburse physicians for performing these services and six more are considering it. Here in Florida, it appears that the Agency for Health Care Administration may soon allow Medicaid reimbursement of physicians for provision of oral health assessments and preventive procedures to very young children. This 60-90 minute presentation provides training for physicians in how to perform these oral health procedures. The presentation covers 6 major topics including:

- 1) Etiology and clinical aspects of Early Childhood Caries
- 2) Performance of an oral screening examination
- 3) Risk Assessment
- 4) Application of Fluoride Varnish
- 5) Anticipatory Guidance for Parents/caregivers
- 6) Referral to a Dental home.

This CME program has been presented at several meetings of the Florida Pediatric Society and the Florida Academy of Family Physicians and hospital grand rounds and has been very well received. For further information, please contact Dr. Frank Catalanotto, Professor of Community Dentistry at the University of Florida College of Dentistry, 352-273-5970 or fcatalanotto@dental.ufl.edu.