

ADAPT – ORAL HEALTH FOR OLDER ADULTS

The Fenwick Foundation



ADAPT (Addult Dental Care Access, Prevention and Treatment) is an initiative focused on providing older adults – particularly those living in nursing homes, assisted living residences and senior housing - access to dental care and treatment. Too many of these older adults cannot afford and/or are unable to access this essential health care need. In addition, oral care literacy at many facilities is insufficient – for residents and staff alike. *ADAPT* is focused on closing these treatment and literacy gaps and encouraging preventive care practices and good oral hygiene.

About Our Initiative

The Fenwick Foundation (Fenwick), a 501(c)(3) public charity, recently completed a pilot project in Northern Virginia designed to test different ways of providing care and treatment for this population. We coordinated with local dental practices, long-term care facility staff, nonprofit partners and governmental agencies to work through the financial and logistical “red tape” and impediments to care. We learned that while the financial costs of care are the biggest challenge, the logistical challenges are a “close second” and too often result in no dental care treatment at all. We set out to change this condition.

- ✓ ***ADAPT* is focused on overcoming these financial and logistical impediments, ensuring that patients have access to care and actually receive care – comprehensive care. We work to identify sources of income to pay for dental care. We also work to identify best approaches for care – dental visits, on-site treatment at long-term care facilities, oral hygiene education and follow up.**

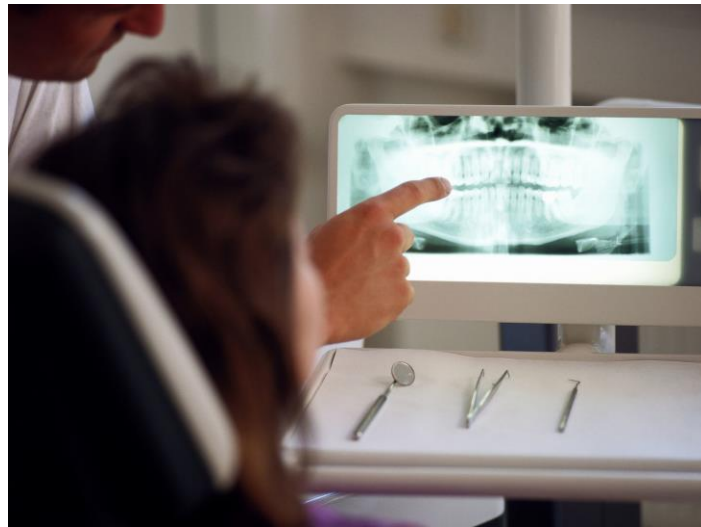
It is clear that new ways and methods are needed to garner dental care resources for this older adult population. As such, we believe that our initiative is innovative – adapting and adjusting to the challenges older adults face to keep themselves healthy. *ADAPT* emphasizes coordination, collaboration and employment of **system change** as needed.

- ✓ ***ADAPT* is sustainable in that it identifies available payment sources – private pay, Medicaid and related reimbursement, and grants/donations. It is designed to employ creative approaches to make it easier for dental professionals to treat older adults – by assessing and determining the best ways to access and receive dental care. Patients are scheduled in groups for on-site facility checkups, cleaning, and treatment.**
- ✓ ***ADAPT* is not only a program but also a model for how to provide older adults access to dental care – and, even more importantly, to make sure they actually receive it. We have been working with local partners – dental practices, government agencies, nonprofits and long-term care management and staff – to ensure identification of patients, determination of patient payment options, scheduling, treatment and follow up, and providing education and training for promoting good oral hygiene.**

ADAPT is designed to address what we consider to be a major “below the radar” need. Our overriding goal is to make oral care possible for many who otherwise can’t get access to it. We’re determined to make this effort work.

Need and Background

For too many low-income older adults, the lack of any basic dental care is staggering. Many older adults receive dental care and resources do exist. However, large numbers of low income and “80 plus” older adults do not receive **any** significant dental care and suffer from general poor dental health, as well as a full range of dental maladies including periodontal disease, dental caries (tooth decay) and abscess. Good oral care and regular access to dentists are essential to overall health and well-being. A decline in oral health – such as gum disease, missing teeth, and dental cavities – can affect nutritional status, behavior, self-esteem and overall quality of life for older people, as referenced by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Research has uncovered possible links between gum or periodontal disease and diabetes, heart disease and stroke.



Even where care can be afforded, the logistics of providing treatment quite often renders care unattainable. This is most evident with long-term care residents – many decline care at a dental office because the logistics of physically transporting them from the long-term care facility to the dentist, and other in-office impediments, are arduous and overwhelming.

There is ample data and analysis of this need at the federal, state and local levels that qualifies and quantifies the problem. In one Northern Virginia county, a 2014 survey of the County’s long-term care residence centers demonstrated that only a little more than ten percent (10%) of the residents had received any dental care. Further, in many states Medicaid does not generally cover dental care for adults except for emergency medical treatment. The vast majority of Medicaid nursing home residents receive no routine or non-emergency care. Likewise, Medicare does not cover most oral care treatment and services.



The Fenwick Foundation Pilot. In 2015, we set out to tackle this problem. We began a pilot program where we tested different approaches to treatment (to “kick the tires”/assess feasibility) and identified an array of providers and treatment options – focusing on attracting local dentists, clinics, dental schools and government partners, to provide sustainable services for the target population. The results of our pilot indicated that:

- **Virtually all patients receiving dental care required additional follow up treatment as documented in treatment plans;**
- **In-facility dentistry emerged as an essential and logical treatment approach, particularly given that so many are physically and otherwise challenged;**
- **In-facility care helps to bend the cost curve by providing services on-site and for defined blocks of time where multiple patients are seen and treated;**
- **Addressing the necessary logistics of care are essential for this target population.**

How ADAPT Addresses the Need

The *ADAPT* initiative builds off our pilot results. *ADAPT* addresses the challenges and logistics of providing oral care by:

- ✓ **Increasing patient capacity** – Fenwick’s initiative provides oral care to individuals who currently do not receive any or adequate care.
- ✓ **Expanding the scope of services provided** – Fenwick’s in-facility efforts bring oral care to those for whom the logistics of dental office treatment are difficult and challenging.

- ✓ **Developing system change and enhancing coordinated systems of care** – Fenwick’s initiative is designed to link other community resources and to facilitate these linkages. Our initiative includes new protocols for coordination with long-term care facility management and staff, oral care professionals and other community resources.

Community Engagement and Collaboration

We planned and executed our pilot with input and recommendations from government officials, nonprofit partners, long-term care management/staff and advocates. We will continue these efforts as we implement our broader initiative. Our resource efforts have been focused on grants, in-kind services and partnerships with long-term care and affordable housing organizations, including:

- **Grant funding from organizations including the Philip L Graham Fund, Arlington Community Foundation, Washington Forrest Foundation and Inova;**
- **Working to identify all government, private and insurance reimbursement options;**
- **Collaboration with long-term care facilities to provide space, electrical outlets and a water source for dental equipment use for in-facility dental care efforts.**

From our standpoint, the effectiveness of these efforts is very dependent on the credibility of our programming and services. The pilot has helped to lay a solid foundation. Going forward, we will continue and enhance our partnerships to encourage more community engagement and collaboration.

Changing No to Yes!

Lastly, our initiative and focus have helped to change thinking about the efficacy of oral care for this target population of older adults. This underlying shifting of “can’t do” to “can do” is a fundamental and so important for the success of this initiative.

About the Fenwick Foundation. The Fenwick Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity focused on services and support designed to improve quality of life and wellbeing in ways that are not addressed or “below the radar.” We serve older adults, Veterans, people with disabilities and caregivers in the Washington, DC Metro area, Baltimore Metro area and several other locations along the East Coast. Visit us at our web site: www.thefenwickfoundation.org.