Oral Health 2020: A Vision for Integrated Care

Oral Health 2020: A Vision for Integrated Care is the result of collective thinking about inspiring, motivating, and educating healthcare providers to take charge in shaping the future of healthcare delivery to improve oral health outcomes. It envisions a new, responsive model that enhances the practice of dentistry and medicine by promoting integration of oral health into primary health care. It is a bold effort to engage healthcare providers, from the broad spectrum of the healthcare professions, in identifying healthcare delivery models that innovate and lead to an aspired integration.

The symposium will showcase existing healthcare delivery models that take significant steps toward integration; it will showcase existing financing efforts that understand the value of oral health integration to improve health outcomes; and it will explore health profession education models that value and contribute to the integration of oral health into primary care. Lastly, the symposium will provide the venue for healthcare providers to reflect on the knowledge gained and provide recommendations to further knowledge and evidence that strengthens local, national, and global efforts to integrate oral health into primary care.

Dental disease is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. Labeled a “silent epidemic” by the U.S. Surgeon General, dental disease is a universally prevalent chronic disease with an infectious root cause. The disease affects, in greater measures, vulnerable population groups across the lifespan, including pregnant women, children and adolescents, and older adults. It also affects disproportionately low-income people, minority groups, and people with special health care needs, generating greater access inequalities.

These inequalities and the persistent barriers to healthcare access are inspiring new and innovative approaches to increasing access to quality care.
Some models emphasize quality and integration of healthcare systems; other models emphasize efficiencies and cost-reduction. This elevates the notion of existing social and market forces that call for new ways to address a problem that has prevailed in spite of years of calling it an “epidemic”.

A concept gaining much attention is the integration of oral health into primary health care. This models potentially reverses the traditional divide between medical and dental health services that has essentially separated the mouth from the rest of the body. The World Dental Federation’s (FDI) 2012 report emphasized that the dental profession can make significant contributions to the improvement of global health during the next decade. The FDI document called for a new model of oral health care underscoring the importance of collaboration and coordination between health care services. In its document, FDI highlighted the following five areas as cornerstones of a new, responsive and fair model:

1. Meet the increasing need and demand for oral healthcare.
2. Expand the role of existing oral healthcare professionals.
3. Shape a responsive educational model.
4. Mitigate the impacts of socio-economic dynamics.
5. Foster fundamental and translational research and technology.

The vision of Center for Oral Health goes beyond a collaboration between dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, medicine, and the various allied health professions such as physical and occupational therapy. We believe that a new, responsive, and fair model must result in a true integration of oral health into primary health care. A new model will effectively address the dysfunctions of the existing healthcare systems which today result in the system's inability to adequately provide access, ensure quality, and restrain costs. Our vision fosters a model of a more adequate healthcare system. A timely, efficient, effective, and patient-centered healthcare system; one that provides equal access for all.