

DENTAL STUDENT ROTATIONS AT COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS IN NORTH DAKOTA

Increasing the Dental Workforce and Serving Community

North Dakota has no dental school. Recognizing the need to address dental workforce shortages, and barriers to recruiting new dental professionals to the state, the North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services Oral Health Program (OHP) and the North Dakota Area Health Education Center financially support dental rotations at three community health centers in North Dakota.

SPECTRA HEALTH

Spectra Health is a federally qualified health center in Grand Forks, N.D. The group has been in operation since 2004 and strives to ensure that high-quality and affordable services are available to everyone in the community. Dental services provided at Spectra Health include dental cleanings, sealants, fillings, extractions, composites, night guards, selective root canals, child-safe nitrous-gas, urgent dental care, restorative crowns, and partial dentures. Spectra Health began hosting dental rotations in 2018.

“I’ve told my friends I love outreach and I don’t want to go back to school.”

FAMILY HEALTHCARE

Family HealthCare, with locations in Fargo, N.D., and Moorhead, Minn., has been providing primary care for residents of Fargo and Moorhead for over 30 years. Dental services include comprehensive dental exams and cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants, x-rays, cavity fillings, extractions, emergency/walk-in dental care, denture care, bridges, and restorative care. Family HealthCare began hosting dental rotations in 2024.

BRIDGING THE DENTAL GAP

Bridging the Dental Gap (BDG), located in Bismarck, N.D., is a non-profit 501(c)3 community dental clinic with a mission to improve access to dental care for persons in their community who are uninsured, under-insured, low-income, and/or covered by Medicaid. Dental services include exams and x-rays, cleanings, fillings, extractions, root planning, sealants and fluoride, root canals and crowns, and partial and full dentures. Bridging began hosting dental rotations in 2023.

COMMUNITY AND STUDENT IMPACT

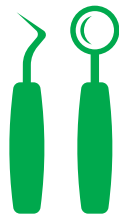
Beginning in 2017, Spectra Health began to host dental student rotations. Reliable data collection began in 2018. Most recently, in 2023, both BDG and Family HealthCare joined the OHP to also coordinate and host dental students.

JANUARY 2019 THROUGH MAY 2024



3

participating health centers



33

dental students



2,430

preventive services



2,070

restorative services



2,296

MA patients served



\$435,213

total MA services billed

CARE PROVIDED BY DENTAL STUDENTS

Dental student rotations have proven to be advantageous for the students, but also provide the health center the opportunity to complete additional services and reduce wait times for patients seeking preventive care. The table highlights the number of services provided by students during their respective dental rotations. Most patients who received care from the dental students were covered by medical assistance (MA). Student rotation lengths vary from ten days to six weeks.

DENTAL STUDENT PROCEDURE REPORT

| Year | Dental Students | Restorative Services | Dental Exams | Preventive Services | Extractions | MA Patients | Total MA Billed |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Spectra Health | | | | | | | |
| 2018 | 3 | 128 | 22 | 21 | 49 | NA | NA |
| 2019 | 4 | 358 | 86 | 62 | 68 | 394 | \$61,035 |
| 2020 | 2 | 161 | 41 | 102 | 18 | 282 | \$35,649 |
| 2021 | 3 | 220 | 19 | 203 | 31 | 208 | \$23,409 |
| 2022 | 4 | 273 | 45 | 440 | 101 | 310 | \$37,193 |
| 2023 | 4 | 321 | 49 | 751 | 50 | 400 | \$80,125 |
| 2024 ^a | 6 | 297 | 53 | 518 | 33 | 219 | \$77,878 |
| Bridging the Dental Gap | | | | | | | |
| 2023-24 ^b | 7 | 158 | 152 | 25 | 60 | 200 | \$83,424 |
| Family HealthCare | | | | | | | |
| 2024 ^c | 3 | 282 | – | 329 | 64 | 283 | \$87,559 |

a. As of August 2024; b. Date range 9/1/2023 – 5/22/2024; c. April 2024 – May 2024

“I really enjoyed being able to do so much dentistry in a day and working with real assistants.”

Students traditionally reported a greater number of restorative services than preventive. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in 2020), dental students began to contribute to reducing the backlog of pediatric patients in need of preventive dental care. In 2018 and 2019, preventive services were only 10% and 11%, respectively, of the care provided by students; by 2022, 51% of dental student services were preventive. In the most recent year, dental students have returned to practicing a greater number of restorative services.

DENTAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES

The program provides housing, dinners, and networking opportunities with private practice dentists. The students spoke positively about their dental professional role, functioning as a lead dental provider, overseeing other dental professionals, and providing patient care as a colleague and member of the care team. Students enjoyed the staff, understood the billing, and learned about loan repayment and other professional topics. Students who rotated at BDG shared that their biggest motivator for attending this rotation was helping the community they grew up in.

“Every preceptor was so willing to teach and they were all very patient with me as I was getting used to working at a faster pace and seeing more than two patients a day. I loved working with the dental assistants.”