

Chelsea Johnston Oral Health Promotion Activity Paper

Assisting for Smart Smiles at Youth Edco high school had the greatest impact on me out of all my OHP volunteer activities. Prior to entering dental school, I worked full time as a dental assistant for Boston University in their Smart Smiles and other school based programs. It was here that I discovered my interest in dentistry and public health dentistry in particular. Returning to assist a year after being away from this role and with a year of dental school under my belt made me look at the program with new light. First off, after working in a tyodont's mouth for 9 months now, it was really exciting to observe the anatomy of real life mouths and see all the variations that occur. I saw students with teeth that were rotated abnormally in the mouth, dental caries, patients undergoing orthodontic treatment, and patients with considerable calculus. I also assisted and watched as a hygienist performed a prophylactic cleaning, flossing, scaling, sealant placement, extra oral and intra oral exam, and fluoride application. I was able to apply knowledge from my first year of school and apply it to what Dr. Culler was performing on the patient. For example, I observed the grooves in which the sealants were placed, had a better understand of the mechanism in which fluoride works, and understood what movements occur in the Temporomandibular joint when the mouth opens. It was extremely satisfying to observe these things that I learned about on a real live patient.

The greater impact that this experience had on me lies in the patients that I saw. For almost a year now, my head has been deep in books, powerpoints, and a tyodont's plastic mouth and devoid of real human experience. Seeing patients today, reminded me that I am working towards being able to treat patients like that myself. Additionally, working in a setting like Youth Edco and providing services to high school students who may not have any other access to care is extremely rewarding. Working in this program for two year motivated me to want to pursue a career working with populations that lack access to care. \ I was unsure about how to do so considering the major debt I will have coming out of Tufts until I attended the Vermont Dental Society visit where I learned about loan forgiveness programs. States like Vermont provide recent graduates with incentives to practice in underserved areas by giving them money towards students loans for every year they practice there. Attending this meeting and making connections with the Vermont Dental society provided me with the information I need to pursue the type of dental career that is most rewarding to me.