

Gopi Surti Oral Health Promotion Activity Reflection Paper

This semester, I was able to take part in three different Oral Health Promotion activities. My favorite experience was reading to the young children at the YMCA daycare in Chinatown. In the past, I worked at a daycare and at a pediatric dental office so I was very excited to have the opportunity to work with children again. Kevin Campbell, a fellow D18 student, and I read books about oral hygiene and dentistry to the children there. The first group that we read to included children in the ages of 4-5. Kevin and I asked questions to the kids during the story and after as well. The kids were eager to respond to us. I noticed that the children remembered parts of the story based on the color of objects they saw in the pictures in the book, such as the red toothbrush and the green mirror. When we read to our second group, which were children between the ages of 2-3, we realized that they could not make much of the story. However, we gave each child the opportunity to come up and brush the teeth of our puppet and they became very engaged in that. We were able to guide their hands when they were brushing the puppets teeth.

I really enjoyed this experience not only because it reminded me of when I used to work with children, but also because I felt like I could really make an impact on these children, especially the older group. Storybooks provide children with a source of entertainment and also a source of interactive learning. By rereading these books to the children, the repetition can help them learn what the steps are in daily oral care routine and what to expect at the dental office.

The majority of the children that we worked with were minorities. Coming from a minority background myself, I know that dental care can be overlooked because it is not something that is strongly enforced in many cultures. Therefore, I think it is critical to learn the importance of proper oral hygiene early in childhood. Many cultures and groups of people may not see oral health as a priority and may not care to ever see a dentist until a major problem occurs. If we can teach children about oral health when they are young, then they take care of themselves and prevent many dental problems. With their own knowledge, they can also help spread the importance of dental health to their families.

This idea of culture and oral health is also relevant to another one of my OHP activities, which involved teaching about oral health care to an elderly Asian group. There were some people at that event that did not pay much attention to our presentation and did not care to get involved in our demonstrations. They were not receptive to the new information we were providing them with because they are comfortable with the minimal oral hygiene routine that is already in their life. I learned that it is harder to persuade an older population to implement a different oral care regimen in their life, even if you provide them with the easiest tools available (regular floss vs. floss picks). This experience with the seniors encouraged me more to continue volunteering with children because I know I can really make an impact on them.

Overall, I really enjoyed all three of my OHP activities. I plan on volunteering again with ASDA's Smile, Share and Care. I also plan on joining the AAPD at our school to get involved in more pediatric dentistry opportunities.