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AAPD Pediatric Dental Workforce Study Appears in ADA Journal

Number of U.S. pediatric dentists projected to increase by over 60 percent within the next decade

CHICAGO (July 10, 2019) — The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), the leading authority on children's oral health, announced that a new study will appear in the July issue of The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA), "Pediatric Dental Workforce in 2016 and Beyond" by Surdu and colleagues. According to the new report, the number of U.S. pediatric dentists is projected to increase by over 60 percent within the next decade.

Commissioned by the AAPD, the study conducted by the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University at Albany, SUNY, gathered exhaustive data on the current supply and distribution of pediatric dentists relative to their patient populations. The Center applied a workforce simulation model to the data to anticipate future supply and demand for pediatric dentists and help ensure children receive recommended dental services.

"Pediatric dentists provide crucial oral health services to our nation's most vulnerable populations – the very young, children from low-income families, and those with special healthcare needs," stated Dr. Kevin Donly, president of the AAPD. "More pediatric dentists mean more access to high-quality oral health care for children and more opportunities to prevent dental disease."

Based on nearly two decades of successful advocacy for federal support of more pediatric dental residency programs, the number of practicing pediatric dentists in the U.S. has nearly doubled, from 4,213 in 2001 to 8,033 in 2018. Per the study, if retirement and graduation rates continue at the current levels, the number of pediatric dentists is projected to increase by 62 percent. Translated into patient access to care, the supply of full-time pediatric dentists will grow from 9 to 14 per 100,000 children.

The supply of pediatric dentists is predicted to continue growing. If children in underserved populations face fewer access barriers, then the higher number of pediatric dentists will be poised to care for the large amount of unmet oral health needs.

“More than half of children with public insurance are visiting a dentist for the first time ever, meaning half still lack care,” said Donly. “Underserved children struggle with higher rates of dental disease. They are more likely to suffer from dental pain and require restorative treatment. That’s why we continually advocate for changes in health policy to reduce barriers to oral health care.”

The study offers solid strategies to increase utilization of oral health services for children. Recommended actions include changes in Medicaid policy affecting the quality or quantity of dental benefits for children, support for pediatric dentists’ participation with Medicaid programs, increased rates of referrals of children by pediatricians and primary care physicians, improvements in oral health literacy of adults parenting or caring for young children, and narrowing of oral health disparities among certain populations of children.

The study also found that the supply of pediatric dentists varies substantially by geographic location. The ratio of pediatric dentists to children is lowest in states with a larger percentage of rural populations. These research results suggest opportunities for providing care in areas not traditionally served by pediatric dentistry, particularly in smaller population centers where the need is great for oral health services for children.

“Now that we have more pediatric dentists, we can devote our efforts to encouraging them to practice in locations previously out of reach of specialist services,” stated Donly. “The expansion of loan repayment assistance programs has helped place more dentists in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas. Children deserve access to the same high-quality oral health services no matter where they live.”

About the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry is the recognized authority on children’s oral health. As advocates for children’s oral health, the AAPD promotes evidence-based

policies and clinical recommendations; educates and informs policymakers, parents and guardians, and other health care professionals; fosters research; and provides continuing professional education for pediatric dentists and general dentists who treat children. Founded in 1947, the AAPD is a not for-profit professional membership association representing the specialty of pediatric dentistry. Its 10,500 members provide primary care and comprehensive dental specialty treatments for infants, children, adolescents and individuals with special health care needs. For further information, visit the AAPD website at <http://www.aapd.org> or the AAPD's consumer website at <http://www.mychildrensteeth.org>.