



Dental Health Certificate Program Elicits More Questions and Answers

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE landmark dental health certificates law, requiring that school districts request a dental health certificate from children, continues to raise questions among both school districts and dental providers. Last September, *The New York State Dental Journal* carried information about the law and how it was to be carried out (Dental health certificates advance profession's mission. NYSDJ 2008;74(5):44-45). There have been developments since that article appeared, including the awarding of a generous grant by the American Dental Association Public Advocacy Program to the New York State Dental Foundation (NYSDF) to ease implementation of the new law.

What follows is an update of information previously presented on dental health certificates. Answers have been provided by NYSDF Executive Director Laura Leon and Milton L Lawney, D.D.S., public advocacy coordinator for the NYSDF.

The NYSDJ: The ADA provided a generous grant to assist in implementing the legislation. Why?

Ms. Leon: The ADA has always been proud that the dental profession stresses prevention and providing the best oral health care to all Americans. As soon as you start talking about providing care to all, you also need to talk about ensuring access to care. The ADA recognized that the New York legislation was innovative and that it has the ability to increase access to oral health care. The grant will enable the NYSDF to implement the legislation, work with stakeholders, provide mailings, create Web sites and develop programs that can be shared with other states.

The NYSDJ: What is meant by the term "comprehensive dental examination," as used in the new law?

Dr. Lawney: The dental examination is used to determine a child's dental health condition. Therefore, it is defined for this purpose as an assessment performed by a dentist or a dental hygienist under the general supervision of a dentist (charting caries and periodontal conditions as an aid to diagnosis by the dentist) for purposes of determining the presence of any painful conditions, obvious swelling related to clinical evidence of open cavities, or any other condition that interferes with a student's ability to chew, speak or focus on school activities.

Radiographs are not expected to be part of this assessment. Rather, this is a visual caries assessment. And it does not have to be performed in a dental office. It proves that the child is not in pain, that the child can concentrate in class, and it is an important measurement tool in assisting state agencies to make sure that all children have a dental home.

The NYSDJ: What is the dentist's liability in providing a dental assessment?

Dr. Lawney: NYSDA and the NYSDF have been sensitive to the patient liability issue when assessing children. The following is an integral part of the Dental Certificate form and must be agreed to by the child's parent or guardian.

"I understand by signing this form I am consenting for the child named above to receive a basic oral health assessment. I understand that this assessment is only a limited means of evaluation to assess

the student's dental health, and I would need to secure the services of a dentist in order for my child to receive a complete dental examination with X-rays if necessary to maintain good oral health.

"I also understand that receiving this preliminary oral health assessment does not establish any new, ongoing or continuing doctor-patient relationship. Further, I will not hold the dentist or those performing this assessment responsible for the consequences or results should I choose NOT to follow the recommendations listed below...."

Some schools may have developed their own form. However, the official certificate that was approved by NYSDA, the New York State Education Department and Department of Health contains protections for the dentist regarding liability and obligation to the patient. We strongly suggest that you use only this form. Copies can be downloaded from the Foundation Web site at www.nysdental-foundation.org.

The NYSDJ: May dentists charge for the assessment?

Dr. Lawney: The law requires that schools offer a list of dentists who offer free or reduced-fee screenings for children who do not have insurance, Medicaid, Child Health Plus, or who are unable to afford such screenings. The purpose of the legislation is to increase access and to find children a dental home. It is hoped that assessments will be provided at no cost for eligible children.

The NYSDJ: What happens if a dentist declares that a child is not in fit dental health condition to permit him/her to attend the public schools?

Dr. Lawney: The law does not require that a student be withheld from attending classes as a result of the findings on the dental health certificate. However, it is hoped that such a finding will cause parents or guardians to make arrangements for care.

The NYSDJ: If a child is not in fit dental health condition and is not able to afford dental treatment, what should the next steps be?

Ms. Leon: First, the dentist should have the child's parent or guardian ascertain if the child is eligible for Medicaid or Child Health Plus by referring the parent or guardian to the local department of social services. Child Health Plus just raised the financial threshold for children to become eligible. Second, if a child is not eligible for Medicaid or Child Health Plus, the parent or guardian may contact the department of social services for the locations of local Article 28 clinics or community health centers that provide reduced-fee or no-cost dentistry. Third, the parent or guardian may contact the local dental component to find out if there are any local charitable organizations or dentists that provide free or reduced-cost dentistry.

The NYSDF is developing two trial programs to address treatment issues if the above protocol

does not provide the needed care. One program will be based upon governmental involvement and one will rely on volunteers. More information will follow regarding these programs.

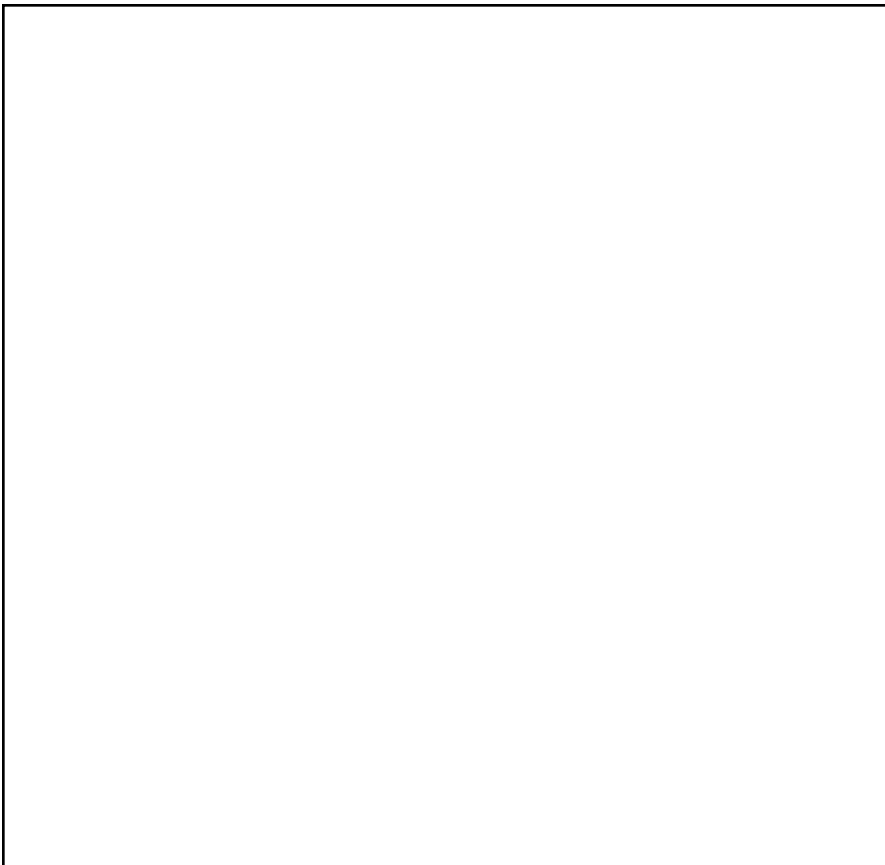
The NYSDJ: How do dentists get involved? How do they plan a schoolwide assessment?

Ms. Leon: Dentists are encouraged to review the information on the NYSDF Web site, www.nysdentalfoundation.org. The Web site provides the ability to sign up electronically to provide assessments. The Foundation will forward members' names and willingness to participate to the appropriate state agencies, to be included on the list of dentists who provide dental assessments for free or at reduced cost for eligible children. If you are not able to sign up electronically, please call the Dental Foundation at (800) 255-2100.

Dental components will also be planning schoolwide and community assessments when necessary. Members should contact their components for further information.

The NYSDJ: Is there anything dentists can do if they find that their school districts have insufficient information regarding dental health certificates?

Dr. Lawney: It is very important that the dental certificate program be implemented consistently throughout the state. The certificate program went into effect on Sept. 1, 2008; however, the State Education Department did not provide implementing policies to the dental community until the middle of September. Also, the information provided to the public schools by the Education



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Department has been inconsistent and requires updating. NYSDA and the NYSDF will be meeting with State Education personnel in the near future to address this situation. Updates will be provided on the Foundation Web page.

If your public school district requires more information regarding dental certificates, please have the district contact the New York State Education Department. They may also review the Foundation's Web page, which has links to the appropriate state agencies. It is important that school districts be fully aware of all policies now so they can fully implement the certificate program this coming September.

The NYSDJ: Have there been any group assessments in 2008, and what can be done locally?

Ms. Leon: Assessments were provided at The New York State Fair with the assistance of the Fifth District Dental Society. The University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine provided an assessment program in cooperation with the Eighth District Dental Society. The Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh districts will provide assessments at 45 Kinney Drug stores in February during Children's Dental Health Month. Suffolk and Nassau County Dental societies are planning large group assessments as part of their Give Kids A Smile program. Also, many dentists have signed up electronically and have provided assessments in their offices.

The success of the dental health certificate program will only come through the continued commitment and hard work of the components. All schools and children are local. They seek care from local dentists, and the components are tied into the resources of their communities. NYSDA, NYSDF and the components are committed to the success of dental health certificates.

To become involved, sign up electronically and contact your local component. Let them know that you want to help. It is about kids.

The NYSDJ: Where can dentists get more information?

Ms. Leon: Please review the information regarding dental health certificates on the Foundation's Web site. The State Education Department has the approved form and answers to frequently asked questions on its Web site, www.opnysed.gov/dentnews.htm. The Q&A is extensive and should be read thoroughly.

Information can also be obtained by calling Dr. Lawney at NYSDE, (800) 255-2100, or writing to him at 20 Corporate Woods Blvd., Suite 602, Albany, NY 12211. ■