

Introduction

The Student Community Outreach for Public Education (SCOPE) program is the University of Pacific School of Dentistry's student-led, volunteer-run community service organization that serves oral health needs in the Bay Area while fostering professional growth amongst students. SCOPE Officers encourage participation in service by the UOP student body by organizing and leading community health projects.

The Senior Smiles and Wellness Event is conducted annually at University of the Pacific Arthur A. Dugoni dental school, with the aim of providing dental care to seniors and elderly individuals who may not have access to such care due to financial or logistical reasons. Among the elderly population, a better oral-health related quality of life (OHRQoL) is correlated with a higher number of teeth, less xerostomia and orofacial pain, and better chewing ability.¹ Toniazzo et al. found malnutrition associated with a lower number of teeth pairs among seniors.² Moreover, several oral health determinants such as dentures, caries history, DMFT scores, tooth-related pain, and periodontal disease are associated with poor OHRQoL among elderly individuals specifically with a low socioeconomic status.³ Oral health among the elderly is pertinent to maintain in order to preserve quality of life.

Methods

SCOPE Officers coordinated with UC Berkeley School of Optometry, UOP School of Physical Therapy, and Masters in Social Work to provide dental, diabetes, vision, balance screenings free of charge to the elderly population in the Bay Area. SCOPE worked to plan and organize the event, coordinate with various schools to provide a multitude of services, gather and train volunteers, and use various marketing tactics to invite seniors around the Bay Area.

Specifically within Dugoni, a team of volunteer dental students, supervised by licensed dental professionals, provided dental screenings at the school clinic. Moreover, students used methods from pre-clinical and clinical experiences to take blood glucose and blood pressure and instruct patients about the relationship between diabetes blood pressure and dental disease. The students used their training to provide dental screenings while also gaining valuable experience working with the elderly population.

Results

SCOPE focuses on serving populations with low socioeconomic status in the community. This is to address health inequality, as poor oral health is associated with this.⁴ SCOPE Officers planned and organized various events throughout the previous school year to help underserved communities in the Bay Area through oral health screenings and education. Specific events focused on children, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals negatively impacted by SDOH. SCOPE has provided students the opportunity to serve the community and develop professional skills.

The Senior Smiles and Wellness Event was successful in educating and promoting health habits in the elderly population in the Bay Area, despite COVID-related hardships. Over 70 senior individuals attended the event and received free screenings and health education in various fields. This event played a small yet impactful part on disputing health inequity among seniors in the local community. Senior Smiles and Wellness was able to demonstrate an interprofessional style of healthcare delivery through the coordination with various schools and their students.



Oral Health and Dental Screening

Senior Smiles and Wellness Health Fair



Conclusion and Future Direction

The Senior Smiles and Wellness event was successful in providing dental and other health screenings to elderly individuals who may have otherwise gone without it. The project allowed volunteers to gain practical experience and develop their interdisciplinary skills while also giving back to the community. The project also highlighted the need for more dental and health care services for elderly individuals, especially those who may not have access to affordable care. This event emphasized the importance of community outreach and volunteer projects in addressing this need. SCOPE plans to continue conducting similar projects in the future, including this event annually, with the hope of reaching more elderly individuals in need of dental care. SCOPE would like to specifically focus on SDOH among the elderly population in the Bay Area to improve OHRQoL.

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