



# CAP ACTION EBLAST



**Do Something! Do One Thing! One Thing Counts!**

The Child Abuse Prevention Action Committee is a collaborative group involved in the planning and promotion of child abuse prevention efforts throughout Oklahoma.

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## Child Abuse Prevention and the Role of The Dentist

One might wonder, “How are dentists able to help in the fight to prevent child abuse and neglect?” This edition of the Eblast will focus on the powerful role of the dentist in protecting children and identify what puts them in a prime position to do so.

### **WHY DO DENTISTS AND PREVENTION MAKE SENSE**

Most physical injuries resulting from abuse or violence are found on the head, face and neck areas that are clearly visible to the dental team during examination. “The mouth specifically is at times a target of physical abuse that can lead to non-accidental injuries, such as, burns in the mouth caused by scalding liquids; fractured teeth; bruises to the palate and inner cheeks; the muscle under the tongue torn or the area under the lip damaged from food or utensils being shoved in the child’s mouth. If the child is the victim of sexual abuse, signs of certain sexually transmitted diseases may present in the mouth, as well.”<sup>1</sup> Given that dental professionals routinely assess these areas, they are in a unique position to identify the signs of abuse and neglect. They can be one more set of eyes to monitor child safety, just by being vigilant observers. The dental team may have an opportunity to get to know the family over a period of time, building the relationship. They are able to observe and assess not only the physical and psychological condition of the children in their care, but also the family dynamics. Visits can be as frequent as one to two times per year, sometimes spending up to forty-five minutes with that child or family members conversing, observing and providing treatment. Many times an abusive parent or caregiver may take a child to various physicians or hospitals over a period of time for treatment, but will visit the same dental office repeatedly.

### **DENTISTS NEED A POLICY AND A PLAN**

Dentists who suspect or recognize some sort of child abuse, have a responsibility of reporting it to concerned authorities, but have to be prepared. While a dentist might come across a victim, it could go unnoticed due to the following reasons:<sup>2</sup>

- Lack of training and experience in identifying
- Limited knowledge of how to intervene effectively
- Concern about offending patients
- Embarrassment about bringing up the topic

Dental teams should plan ahead with a protocol in place for when there is suspicion, equipping themselves with knowledge of child abuse and reporting (in their community), child abuse prevention, and community resources. Involvement of a dentist in the protection team may be beneficial and can lead to early identification and intervention.

### **HELPFUL WEBSITES**

- [http://www.deltadentalok.org/for\\_dentists/pandacde.asp](http://www.deltadentalok.org/for_dentists/pandacde.asp)
- <http://www.ilikemyteeth.org/>
- <http://kidsoralhealthok.org/>



<sup>1</sup>[http://www.deltadentalnj.com/press/070404\\_ChildAbuse.html](http://www.deltadentalnj.com/press/070404_ChildAbuse.html)

<sup>2</sup>J Forensic Dent Sci. 2010 Jan-Jun; 2(1): 2-4

### **Do just one thing! Your one thing counts!**

- ✓ Share prevention resources and the Child Abuse Reporting # with the dentists you know. **1-800-522-3511**
- ✓ Form collaborative partnerships between physicians and dentists.
- ✓ Seek training for staff and healthcare professionals to help identify oral and dental aspects of child abuse and neglect.
- ✓ Make sure caregivers understand the explanation of disease and its implications, and, where barriers to needed care exist, attempt to assist the families in finding help (i.e. transportation, financial aid, et cetera).
- ✓ When parents fail to obtain treatment for children after multiple efforts, make a child abuse report.

### **Agency Spotlight**

Dental Health Services, a division of the Oklahoma State Department of Health, provides the following services statewide: Dental Health Educators instruct elementary school children on how to care for their teeth, tobacco use prevention and proper nutrition. These dental educators provide education to thousands of children, childcare and long term care facility staff as well as WIC clients. In some counties, there are dental clinics at the health departments that are able to provide preventive services and limited dental care primarily to pregnant women and school age children. Dental Health Service continues to support the use of Community Water Fluoridation in our state which is safe, cost effective, and beneficial to all in reducing dental decay. The staff also participate in the Oklahoma Mission of Mercy, a two day, free dental clinic, that moves around the state each year. To learn more about Dental Health Services, visit [den.health.ok.gov](http://den.health.ok.gov).

**OkMOM WILL BE IN ENID, OK**  
**February 7 - 8, 2014**  
**Chisholm Trail Expo Center**



**5<sup>th</sup> Annual OK Mission of Mercy (OkMOM)**  
2-day Dental Clinic - FREE dental services for all  
No requirements or payments (1<sup>st</sup> come, 1<sup>st</sup> serve)  
1,000 served each day

**Register to volunteer at [okmom.org](http://okmom.org)!**

**February is CHILDREN’S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

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**EARLY CHILDHOOD  
TIP SHEETS**

**2014 Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Action begins now! Sign Up today to join efforts!**