

Increasing Access to Periodontal Care in Los Angeles County

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Access to dental care is a major problem in Los Angeles County. Data from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health demonstrated that lower income adults are less likely to have dental insurance. This lack of access to dental care most significantly impacts Latinx adults and non-English speakers in the region. The lack of access to dental care is further complicated by the dental deserts areas which are mostly located in low-income areas. To increase access to dental care and improve the oral health of our community, the UCLA School of Dentistry has been partnering with the community since 2019 to deliver basic dental services to underserved populations, by providing dental cleanings, dental fillings, root canal treatments and extractions. Unfortunately, even if access to dental care is provided, it is limited and does not include surgical treatment for gum disease. By not providing appropriate gum disease treatment, many teeth that could have been saved are extracted and often these patients end up with dentures. Edentulism leads to decreased self-esteem, decreased ability to chew and weight loss, among other things. *The objective of this project was to explore opportunities to expand access to periodontal care in the underserved communities by partnering with UCLA's Community Based Clinical Education Program (CBCE).* To date, feasibility studies have been performed and the Periodontics Department in conjunction with the CBCE Program are now in discussions with two clinics to start a pilot program. Once the contract is in place, the pilot program will consist of sending two second-year periodontal residents and a faculty member to a community clinic one day a week. The primary outcome measures will evaluate the impact on the population (number of services provided annually and the number of individuals that were able to avoid dentures). The secondary outcome measures will evaluate the impact that the program had on residents (enhanced educational experience, humanistic exposure, ability to work more closely to a private practice clinic setting). The successful implementation of this program should improve the oral health of Angelenos, enhance the education of our residents, and align with UCLA's strategic plan which aims to increase community engagement.