

Joint Commission on Health Care

Interim Report: The Cost of Untreated Dental Disease on the Commonwealth (SJR 50 – Senator Barker)

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Jaime Hoyle
Senior Staff Attorney/Health Policy Analyst

Senate Joint Resolution 50 (SJR 50)

- ▶ Directs the Joint Commission on Health Care (JCHC) to complete a two-year study of the fiscal impact to the Commonwealth that results from untreated dental disease. JCHC was asked to:
 - “(i) estimate the payments made by Virginia’s Medicaid program to hospital emergency departments for dental-related diagnoses,
 - (ii) the amount of uncompensated care provided by hospital emergency departments for dental-related diagnoses, and
 - (iii) the number of dental patients treated and the overall value of the dental-related services provided by Virginia’s safety net providers....”

SJR 50

- ▶ SJR 50 was tabled in the House Rules Committee, but JCHC members voted to include it in the 2012 work plan.
- ▶ This interim report briefly discusses the importance of oral health and the effects of untreated dental disease.
- ▶ The final report will focus on Virginia-specific data, with funding and policy options presented next year.

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Importance of Oral Health to Overall Health

- ▶ Approximately 80% of American adults have some form of periodontal disease.
 - With routine dental care, this disease can be prevented or detected early and treated aggressively.
- ▶ Periodontal disease is linked to diabetes and an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.
- ▶ Pregnant women with gum disease are 7 times more likely to have a preterm or low birth weight baby.
 - Tooth decay in the mother puts the child at a higher risk of also developing cavities, leading to weakened oral health.
- ▶ Tooth decay and infection often cause pain which can result in missed school and work and in some extreme cases death may occur.

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Importance of Preventive Oral Health Care

- ▶ Routine dental exams can uncover osteoporosis, low bone mass, eating disorders, HIV (which often shows signs in the mouth first), and oral cancer.
- ▶ Studies also indicate a correlation between poor oral health and academic performance, including lower grades and more school absences.
 - A Wisconsin study found 3,300 middle and high school students missed school in the past year because of tooth or gum pain.

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Untreated, Preventable Dental Disease Leads to Higher Costs and Temporary Solutions

- ▶ Lack of access to dental care often means people with dental problems seek care in costly emergency departments (EDs).
 - Approximately 1.7% of visits to an ED in the U.S. are for oral health problems.
- ▶ According to a Pew Research Center study of ED utilization in the U.S., preventable dental problems were the primary diagnosis in 830,590 ED visits in 2009, an increase of 16% from 2006.
 - On average, the cost of inpatient hospital treatment for dental problems is nearly 10 times the cost of preventive care provided in a dentist's office for Medicaid enrollees in the U.S.

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Emergency Department Visits

- ▶ EDs are the most expensive treatment provider and typically provide only temporary relief for dental problems.
 - They often only treat the pain or give antibiotics for the infection; the underlying problem is not treated and the patients will return.
- ▶ Recent studies indicate peak times for dental ED visits are during business hours, an indication of a lack of access to routine dental care providers.
- ▶ A recent national study estimated that for the 10-year period (ending in 2007-08), the number of dental-related ED visits (per 1000 in population) increased from 4.2 to 7.5.
 - The increase was highest for young adults (20 to 34 years old) increasing from 8.5 to 17.6; followed by an increase from 4.2 to 8.5 for adults aged 35 to 49.

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2013 Activities

- ▶ In completing the study next year, at a minimum, staff will seek to answer the following questions:
 - What are the barriers to receiving dental care in Virginia?
 - How many Virginians have dental insurance coverage and what are the utilization rates?
 - How do persons without dental insurance receive dental care, and what are the associated costs to the Commonwealth?
 - What is the estimated cost of untreated dental disease in the Commonwealth?
 - What is the possible impact of the Affordable Care Act, if retained, on dental care in the Commonwealth?
- ▶ Policy and funding options for increasing the availability of preventive dental care in Virginia will be presented.

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