

Third Place: Best Paper Award

The Origins of Minnesota's Mid-Level Dental Practitioner: Alignment of Problem, Political and Policy Streams

Anne E. Gwozdek, RDH, BA, MA; Renee Tetrick, MSW, MPP; H. Luke Shaefer, PhD

The Journal of Dental Hygiene Best Paper Award was created to recognize the most outstanding research paper published from the previous year (2014). All original research papers published in 2014 were evaluated by a panel of judges, using specific criteria, to make the final selection. Below is a reprinting of the abstract of the third place recipient. This manuscript first appeared in Volume 88, Issue Number 5 of the October 2014 issue of the Journal of Dental Hygiene.

Abstract

Purpose: Using John Kingdon's agenda-setting model, this paper explores how Minnesota came to legislate a mid-level dental practitioner to its oral health workforce. Using a pluralist framework embracing the existence of various interests and convictions, this analysis highlights the roles of issue formation, agenda setting and politics in policymaking.

Methods: Using Kingdon's agenda-setting model as a theoretical lens, and applying case study methodology, this paper analyzes how Minnesota came to legislate a mid-level dental practitioner to its oral health workforce. Data have come from scholarly research, governmental and foundation agency reports, interviews with leaders involved in the mid-level dental practitioner initiative, news articles, and Minnesota statute.

Results: After 2 years of contentious and challenging legislative initiatives, the problem, policy and political streams converged and aligned with the compromise passage of a bill legalizing mid-level dental practitioner practice. The Minnesota Dental Therapist Law was the first-in-the-nation licensing law to develop a new dental professional workforce model to address access to oral health care.

Conclusion: The Minnesota mid-level dental practitioner initiative demonstrates the important convergence and alignment of the access to oral health care problem and the subsequent collaboration between political interest groups and policymakers. Through partnerships and pluralist compromise, mid-level dental practitioner champions were able to open the policy window to move this legislation to law, enhancing the oral health workforce in Minnesota.

Keywords: Kingdon's agenda-setting model, mid-level dental practitioner, access to care, policy, dental therapist, advanced dental therapist, dental health aide therapist

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