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Research Focus

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NIDCR Dental Practice Based Research Networks

In March of 2005, the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) awarded 3 7-year grants, totaling \$75 million, to establish regional dental practice-based research networks (PBRN) to investigate clinical problems of interest to dentists and dental hygienists working in private practice. The grants were awarded to New York University, University of Alabama, and the University of Washington. University of Florida is working cooperatively with the University of Alabama, and Oregon Health Sciences University is working cooperatively with the University of Washington.

Each of these regional networks will train approximately 100 dentists to perform clinical research studies within their practices. The networks will include practitioners in their own states, as well as from surrounding states. This approach to research is unique, in that it allows for the conduct of high quality clinical research by dentists and dental hygienists in the private practice setting, where they will be able to investigate everyday problems and topics of importance to practitioners. These studies will provide data that will help to guide treatment decisions in the dental office, an effort that supports evidence-based practice.

Practitioners apply to become members of the research network and work directly with the project team experts at the university. Applicants receive training in research protocols, human subjects' protection, and study monitoring. Practitioners submit their own ideas for clinical studies, and when approved, experts design the appropriate trial. Then, practitioners in the network implement the study in their practices. Analysis of the data and tabulation of the results will be conducted by experts at the university. Study findings will be disseminated at professional meetings and in publications in the scientific literature.

It is anticipated that each regional network will conduct approximately 15 to 20 short-term clinical studies over the next 7 years. Studies will investigate dental procedures, dental materials, and prevention strategies in a wide variety of populations and clinical circumstances. The networks will also conduct retrospective chart reviews, in accordance with HIPPA, to investigate disease patterns, prevalence of oral diseases and disorders, and treatment trends.

At the ADHA Annual session in Orlando, 2 members from the University of Alabama PBRN network project team gave a presentation at the Research Conference. They encouraged dental hygienists in their geographic region to submit ideas for clinical studies for consideration by the network, and to participate in their studies. As the ADHA liaison to this NIDCR project, I commend the University of Alabama for reaching out to the dental hygiene community and encouraging our participation. This project is an excellent opportunity for dental hygienists to become involved in clinical research. This is a well-coordinated effort involving NIDCR, universities, established investigators, and practitioners in a model approach that encourages collaboration. It is a rare and unique chance to be able to participate in a funded study that involves our own patients in the settings where we practice. This is a great time to pursue your interest in research and get started right in your own backyard.

Dental hygienists who are employed by dentists who are participants in a PBRN, and/or those who are interested in participating, should contact the appropriate network within their regions for additional information. The Web sites for each of the networks is listed below.

Practitioners Engaged in Applied Research and Learning (PEARL). New York University. <http://www.pearlnetwork.org>

Dental Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN). University of Alabama at Birmingham. <http://www.dentalpbrn.org>

Practice-based Research Collaborative in Evidence-based Dentistry. Northwest PRECEDENT. University of Washington.
<http://clinicaltrialsworkbench.axioresearch.com/nwprecedent>