



Memorandum

To: Senator Jeanette White, Chair; Senate Committee on Government Operations

From: Michelle Fay, Executive Director

Date: May 1, 2018

Re: Update on implementation of dental therapy

Almost two years have passed since the legislature passed S.20/Act 161, and while the implementation process has been slower than anticipated, Voices and our partners remain optimistic and committed. Voices is the lead organization in the Vermont Oral Health Care for All coalition, the consumer advocacy group that organized around improving access to oral health for underserved populations. Since the legislature authorized dental therapists to practice in Vermont, we've monitored the rulemaking process, supported the development of the education program at VT Technical College, and conducted outreach to potential employers of dental therapists.

Rulemaking

Initial estimates from the former staff attorney for the Board of Dental Examiners suggested that rulemaking could be completed in six to eight months. Unfortunately, the board faced several delays related to staffing that could not have been anticipated or prevented. In addition, the board decided to review and revise all dental rules at the same time, substantially increasing the scope of the project. And finally, the board has been cancelled several times due to weather or lack of quorum. All of these factors have combined to push the current estimated completion date to late 2018. Draft rules are nearly complete, after which the public comment period and ICAR/LCAR reviews will commence. We are generally satisfied with the current draft rules' fidelity to the statute and our interpretation of legislative intent.

Education Program

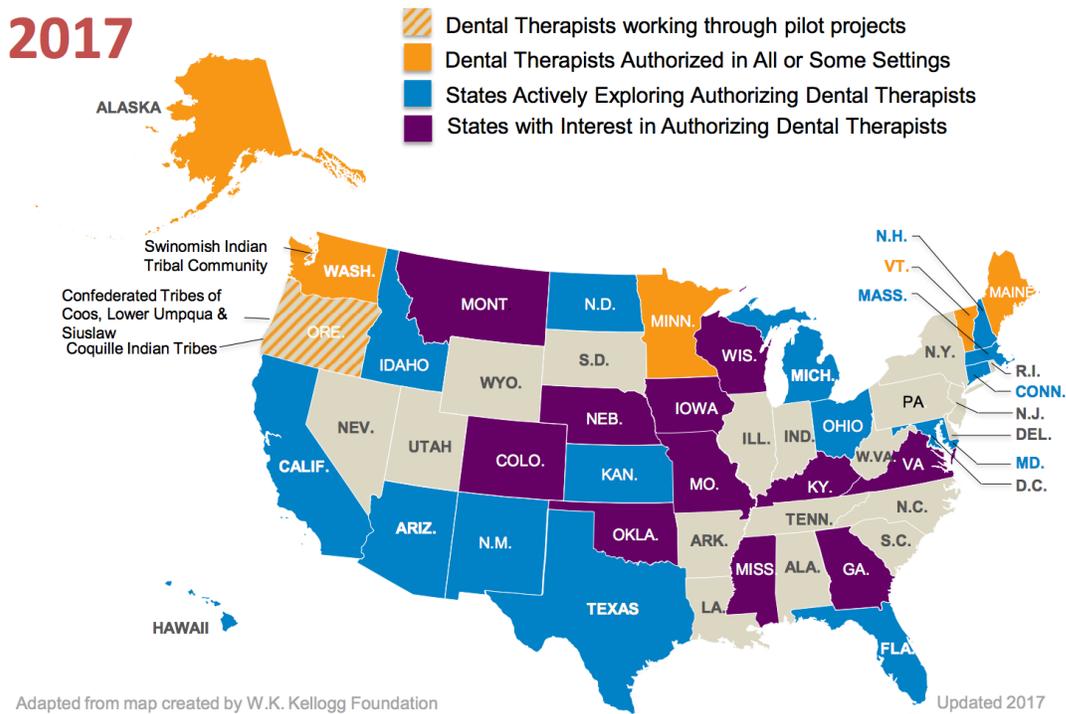
You will hear directly from Dr. Grimes and President Moulton about the progress of the Dental Therapy program at VT Tech. Our support role has focused on connecting VT Tech with national technical assistance providers, assisting with grant writing and funder communications, and partnering on outreach to dentists regarding hiring and supervising graduates of the dental therapy program.

Dentist Outreach

Organized dentistry has not yet fully embraced dental therapy, although there are signs that state dental associations are recognizing that the profession is gaining momentum. Dental therapists are now working in four states, authorized in two others (Maine and VT), and legislation is actively being pursued in more than a dozen states. Massachusetts seems poised to pass a bill this year with the support of the state dental association, albeit with unnecessary practice limitations that will constrain the usefulness of the provider. In total, a majority of US states are now engaged in some effort to expand the dental health team to include dental therapists or dually-licensed hygiene-therapists.

Momentum for Dental Therapists

2017



Our coalition continues to counter lingering misunderstandings about dental therapy among Vermont dentists. We've surveyed dentists about the dental therapy topics they'd like to explore, and are developing webinars and brown bag lunch presentations for interested practices which we expect to offer this summer and fall. There has been an issue of "ripeness" with our early outreach efforts, with dentists reluctant to engage until the arrival of trained DTs in VT is imminent.

A recent survey conducted by the VT Dept. of Health reported that 29 VT dentists are currently interested in hiring a dental therapist. Each dentist may employ two DTs, so at this early stage of implementation we are enthusiastic about the demand, and confident that once dental therapists begin practicing and demonstrating their positive impact on both access to care and practices' bottom line, more and more dentists will adopt the team approach. This was certainly the case with the advent of dental hygiene, and has been the case with dental therapists in Minnesota.