

**American Dental Association gets in way of Alaska Native Health**

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To what length will the American Dental Association go in order to harass the members of the Alaska Native Health dental program? In a meeting several years ago, I asked that the ADA not discount the federally sanctioned 35-year-old Tribal Community Health Aide Program and its most recent addition, the Dental Health Aide program, simply because it was a system that it did not recognize.

The Community Health Aide Program and associated village clinics have long been the center of Alaska Native life. The intent of this system was never to supersede the doctor/patient relationship but to augment it. Having trained, skilled local people on hand for first-responder care when living 250 miles from the nearest hospital or dental clinic is a necessity.

The advent of telemedicine technology now allows for these first-responder health aides to transmit digital photographs of any number of injuries, dental caries or other problems directly to the medical/dental provider for triage. The refinement of this technology over the past 10 years makes a great number of procedures and interventions possible.

The DHA is not a fly-by-night scam but a well-planned, well-supervised means to provide competent care in a culturally responsible way. Godspeed to the new Dental Health Aides.

---- Carol Odinzoff, RN

Past Chairwoman, CHAP Directors Association (2000-2002)

Anchorage