

Anchorage Daily New

Letter to the Editor

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Can dentists opposed to aides' work in Bush really care about patients?

Recently I was in a hospital, curled up in a ball, wailing. One by one, next-door patients came offering to call a nurse. It was nice but useless.

The assigned doctor, who could authorize anything stronger than ibuprofen, was out of reach. It seemed unfathomable that, while surrounded by the latest medical technology with round-the-clock care, I was left suffering for hours, all due to poor coordination.

Imagine now that you have an abscessed tooth and relief is not hours, but days away. Shortage of dentists makes it a reality for most people living in rural communities. A solution offered by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to train dental therapists and alleviate the shortage met an organized opposition from the Alaska Dental Society, which ran a negative TV campaign and filed a lawsuit against ANTHC arguing that dental therapists are not fully licensed.

It is appalling that a professional association, whose members are doctors with a duty to put patients' welfare first, would engage in a dispute over which license, state or federal, supersedes in Alaska. If this group had patients' interests at heart, it would work on coming up with an acceptable solution to the licensing issue. But then again, only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

---- Rada Jones

Anchorage