

**Excerpt from the Indian Health Service website**

(<http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/MCH/C/documents/ICHN1005.doc>)

***“It doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice.”***

Deng Hsiao P’ing 1904-1997

This a page for sharing “what works” as seen in the published literature as well as what is done at sites that care for American Indian/Alaskan Native children. If you have any suggestions, comments or questions please contact Steve Holve, MD, Chief Clinical Consultant in Pediatrics at [sholve@tcimc.ihs.gov](mailto:sholve@tcimc.ihs.gov)

## **IHS Child Health Notes**

**October 2005**

### **Recent literature on American Indian/Alaskan Native Health**

Doug Esposito, MD

Confronting oral health disparities among American Indian/Alaska Native children: The Pediatric Oral Health Therapist.

*Am J Public Health.* 2005;95(8):1225-29.

[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list\\_uids=16006412&query\\_hl=2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=16006412&query_hl=2)

### **Summary**

The authors outline the historical development and recent deployment of Pediatric Oral Health Therapists in rural Alaska as a means of addressing the disparities that exist with regard to dental health and access to dental services in isolated Native communities. American Indian/Alaska Native children suffer from the highest rates of tooth decay and the poorest dental health in the Nation. For many, access to dental service is severely limited. In Alaska, geographic isolation serves as a significant barrier. Additionally, it has been extremely difficult to attract dentists to rural and isolated areas, but not for want of trying! The authors make a cogent moral and public health argument in support of the Dental Health Aide and the Pediatric Oral Health Therapist Program as it is currently being planned.

### **Editorial Comment**

The interested reader will want to review the American Dental Association’s (ADA) negative view of the Pediatric Oral Health Therapist Program as outlined in the May 2005 issue of the American Journal of Public Health “Improving the Oral Health of Alaska Natives.” Also of interest is the Anchorage Daily News article “Dental Training Rouses Protest from Dentists,” which appeared on June 1, 2005. The integrity of this rational and innovative approach to reduce dental health disparities by increasing access to quality care for isolated communities is jeopardized as a result of this ADA attack. Can valid programs serving the greater good ever succeed when pitted against the

economic interests and controlling tendencies of relatively small professional groups in a democratic capitalist society (yikes!)? Efforts to develop oral health therapist programs have failed before in the United States at the hand of such attacks, despite documented efficacy and safety from other countries. Will this brave attempt also fail? Only time will tell.

### **Additional Reading**

Improving the oral health of Alaska Natives.

*Am J Public Health*. 2005 May;95(5):769-73.

[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list\\_uids=15855450&query\\_hl=1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=15855450&query_hl=1)

Dental training rouses protest from dentists. *Anchorage Daily News*. June 1, 2005.

<http://www.adn.com/news/alaska/story/6556940p-6439704c.html>

Developing a pediatric oral health therapist to help address oral health disparities among children. *J Dent Educ*. 2004 Jan;68(1):8-20.

[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list\\_uids=14761168&query\\_hl=2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=14761168&query_hl=2)