



Northeastern University

Bouvé College of Health Sciences

INNOVATIONS IN INTERPROFESSIONAL ORAL HEALTH CARE: TECHNOLOGY, INSTRUCTION, PRACTICE, SERVICE (TIPS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global society faces no greater healthcare challenge than the “silent epidemic” of oral diseases and oral health disparities. In the United States alone, the burden of oral diseases impacts millions of children and adults, particularly those in our most vulnerable and underserved populations – poor children, pregnant women, older adults, individuals with special health care needs, and racial and ethnic minority groups. The consequences of oral diseases are significant and adversely impact general health and well-being across the life cycle.

With generous funding support from the DentaQuest Foundation, Northeastern University Bouvé College of Health Sciences has established *Innovations in Interprofessional Oral Health Care: Technology, Instruction, Practice, and Service (TIPS)*, a program to help prepare students from multiple health professions to enter their practices ready and willing to address the oral health needs of their patients. “Dental disease is a chronic, infectious illness that is very preventable,” said Ralph Fuccillo, Chief Mission Officer, DentaQuest and President, DentaQuest Foundation. “A primary care clinician may be the first and sometimes only health professional to evaluate the oral health of some people. The work of Professor Dolce and her Northeastern University colleagues are expanding the role that the health team has to improve oral health; that’s thousands of new eyes ready to identify and help individuals who are at risk for dental disease.”

In recent decades, several landmark reports have highlighted the importance of oral health to overall health and the need for an interprofessional, team-based approach to the prevention and treatment of oral diseases. These include the U.S. Surgeon General’s report, *Oral Health in America*, the Institute of Medicine’s reports, *Advancing Oral Health in America* and *Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations*, and the 2010 Lancet Commission Report on transformative learning in health professions education. The 2011 Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, representing professional associations across healthcare, supported a competency approach to health professions education and established core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice to improve health.

Improving access to quality oral health care calls for the integration of oral health care into comprehensive health care, and involvement of all health care professionals in oral health promotion and disease prevention. “Preparing health professionals with team-based competencies in oral health promotion and disease prevention, and shifting from educating health professionals separately to interprofessional education, are imperatives for improving oral health in America,” said Bouvé dean, Terry Fulmer.

The TIPS program is Northeastern’s response to the national need to prepare a “collaborative practice-ready” workforce with the skills to work together in interprofessional teams toward improving oral health. In collaboration with key interprofessional stakeholders, Bouvé College will develop, implement, and

evaluate a replicable, scalable, and sustainable model for integrating oral health into interprofessional, team-based health education across its multiple academic programs; and promoting a team-based, collaborative practice approach to oral health promotion and disease prevention in primary care settings.

The TIPS program will implement a single interprofessional curriculum on oral health across the education and training of nursing, pharmacy, and physician assistant students. It will provide a common understanding about interventions that can make a difference and a common language with which to connect with dental specialists. The approach integrates Smiles for Life: A National Oral Health Curriculum (www.smilesforlifeoralhealth.org) with core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice; leverages innovations in technology, instruction, and experiential learning; and links education and clinical practice to achieve optimal oral health. Learning innovations will bring students together from health professions, including pharmacy, nursing, physician assistant, public health, physical therapy, speech-language pathology/audiology, counseling/applied psychology, and health sciences, to learn about, from, and with each other toward a shared goal of improving oral health. TIPS will expand the network of oral health champions committed to integrating oral health in primary care education and practice, an effort led by the National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health (www.niioh.org).

About Bouvé College of Health Sciences

Bouvé College of Health Sciences is situated within the rich landscape of biomedical and health care partnerships in the greater Boston area and newly expanded University graduate campuses in Seattle, Washington, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Bouvé College is committed to the generation and translation of knowledge to improve health for all people, especially vulnerable and underserved populations. Focal areas of scientific inquiry include urban population health, healthy aging across the lifespan, self-care/self-management, and drug delivery/discovery, all of which provide the perfect complement for advancing oral health.

Northeastern University has a more than 100-year history of experiential learning innovations with its well-established cooperative education (co-op) and service-learning programs. The co-op program offers varied positions in Boston's renowned biomedical and health care community including community health centers, clinics, schools, pharmacies, and hospitals where students learn to work together as a health care team. Experiential learning opportunities connect classroom education to professional practice and foster social accountability in improving health for vulnerable and underserved populations. Its signature program in experiential learning distinguishes Bouvé College of Health Sciences as an innovator in interprofessional health education.

About the DentaQuest Foundation

The DentaQuest Foundation is committed to optimal oral health for all Americans through its support of prevention and access to affordable care, and through its partnerships with funders, policymakers and community leaders. For more information, please visit dentaquestfoundation.org.

For more information, contact:

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