Adding Restorative Care to Health Center Mobile Dental Programs

Organization:
Community Health Center, Inc., New Britain, CT

Summary:
Since 2002, Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC) has been providing mobile dental services to school aged children in Connecticut. The program provides care to approximately 7,000 children in over 160 locations. CHC employs 10 mobile teams comprised of a dental hygienist and a care coordinator who ensures care is delivered efficiently and effectively. Portable dental equipment is used and transported to each new location. The administrative support structure including a care coordinator and a program manager has a pivotal role within the program.

The biggest challenge is the completion of restorative care for children identified at the mobile sites. There are three ways the children with identified decay can have their work completed. First, the children can be referred for care to a local private dental practice after a referring relationship has been defined and established. Secondly, the children can be referred for care to the closest clinic location. While both are viable solutions, the same barriers that prevented the guardian from bringing the child into the office still exist, including transportation or timing issues. The third option and the most effective one is to deliver the restorative care right on site directly after the preventive services. The dentist and the assistant would arrive to the school location with their restorative armamentarium and treat the patient. A small percentage of procedures require the clinic setting and some children may require either a pediatric dental office or an OR setting to complete the care. This subgroup would still follow the referral process for an outside provider.

When starting a new school or adding the restorative piece to an already existing program, the program manager meets with the school representative to answer any questions and to execute a Memorandum of Agreement. The program is discussed with staff and parents, and enrollment begins. Next, the health center hygiene team starts with preventive visits, charting and films. The care coordinators ensure all the paper work has been completed so that restorative care can begin. The dates for the restorative care are determined, and patients are scheduled for restorative care and exams with the dentist. The care coordinator works with school staff when it comes to taking students out of the classroom and care is taken not to interfere with mandatory educational time and testing.

Lessons Learned:
The following methods and practices helped CHC reach its goal:
- Central administrative structure
- Organized trainings, manuals, meetings
- Frequent “check-in” calls
- Regular visits to ensure quality and adherence to established policies
- Deliberate and frequent communication with school representative
- Fast action to complete care
- Support from local dental societies
- Establish data collection tools early
- Standard communication between care coordination and clinic front desk staff

CHC has piloted restorative care utilizing the mobile unit with great success: 97% of care was completed within the school system.

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