

Report of the
Nebraska Dental Work
Force Committee

2001

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Statistics compiled in recent years by the American Dental Association indicate that nearly 6,000 dentists are retiring each year and only 4,000 new graduates are joining the dental work force. Obviously, “doing the math” is cause for concern.

In 1998, the North Dakota Dental Association surveyed dentists in their state. One question referred to the number of years dentists expected to continue practicing. When the results were tallied it was a shock to learn that 40% of North Dakota’s dentists planned to retire within the next 10 years. That’s a very high percentage. Especially in a state that has no dental college.

Even more startling figures were recently disclosed by the Washington State Dental Association. The following statistics and information are from the University of Washington’s Center for Health Workforce Studies.

“We in Washington are confronting a turning point in our profession. The challenges of availability of care and access for all patients, in the face of major forecasted workforce constraints, are more than rhetoric. The results of our recent workforce survey conducted in conjunction with the University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies contain many troubling facts, among them:

- Fifty percent of practicing dentists plan on retiring by 2013;
38 percent by 2010
- Nearly 40 percent of dental offices have vacancies for hygienists
- A greater percentage of Washington dentists, compared to all U.S. dentists, are in or approaching retirement age (45 years or older)

“Clearly, we will be facing a severe shortage of dentists and are currently trying to cope with a long-standing hygienist shortage. The resultant access problems created for the entire population will have an adverse impact on our profession, if we do not act now to expand the productivity of the system.”

In 1999, the Nebraska Dental Association asked the same question to Nebraska dentists that appeared on the North Dakota Survey. The survey revealed that 31.1% of our state’s dentists planned to retire by 2009. Not as high as North Dakota’s projected retirement numbers but still a significant percentage.

There are only 55 dental schools in the U.S. Two of them are in Nebraska, Creighton University in Omaha and the University of Nebraska’s College of Dentistry in Lincoln. The states of Kansas, Wyoming, South Dakota and North Dakota are without a dental school. Minnesota, Colorado and Iowa each have 1 school. Creighton’s dental students are from states throughout the U.S. and in recent years very few of their graduates have remained in Nebraska. University of Nebraska students are mostly from Nebraska and surrounding states, a significant percentage remain in Nebraska after graduation. See addendum #1A & #1B for further information on where dental students are from and where they are practicing.

NEBRASKA’S DENTAL WORK FORCE – 2001

As of October 2001, 980 dentists were practicing in Nebraska. If these 980 professionals were equally distributed throughout the state, access to care might not be a major concern. However, the number of dentists in the Lincoln and Omaha areas are much higher per capita than in the rest of the state. As of April 2002, Douglas County (Omaha) had 373 licensed dentists and Lancaster County (Lincoln) had 234 licensed dentists. A per capita map appears at the end of this report. Eighteen counties have no dentists and 30 counties have only 1 or 2 dentists.

The number of counties considered “underserved” is likely to climb in the next few years, as dentists reaching retirement age are unable to recruit recent graduates to buy their practices.

Since 1993, the number of dentists has decreased by 46 or 4.5% of all dentists. However, during this same period the state’s population increased slightly. During the decade of the 1990’s, only 147 dentists entered practice in Nebraska compared to 290 in 1980’s. During the same 20-year period, the state’s population grew an estimated 6%.

It seems worth noting that when a dentist can’t sell his or her practice in an underserved area, it not only leaves a void in healthcare for that vicinity, it is also a financial blow to the community due to lost jobs and economic development. A dentist may have counted on selling a thriving practice for several hundred thousand dollars; now the reality is that they will be lucky to sell their equipment for a few thousand dollars to colleagues. The dentist loses and so does the community and its residents.

Total Number of Nebraska Actively Practicing Dentists

<u>Survey Year</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Increase/(Decrease)</u>
1985	977	
1989	984	7
1991	1008	24
1993	1026	18
2000	980	(46)

Total Nebraska Actively Practicing Dentists by Decade of Graduation

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Total Active</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Unknown	39	3.9
Before 1960-1969	207	21.1
1970-1979	289	29.5
1980-1989	290	29.6
1990-1999	147	15.0
2000-2001	8	0.8
TOTAL	980	100

The age and gender of Nebraska's dentists is also of interest when trying to evaluate the future of the dental workforce.

The overall aging of actively practicing dental practitioners is noted by the fact that within 10 years, 27% of the current dental workforce will be over the age of 65 and likely retired. The departure of male dentists will be greatest as they are 98.3% of those over 50 years of age, and 1.7% are female. The dentists under 50 years of age are comprised of 81.3% male and 18.7% female. The percentage of Nebraska's actively practicing dentists shows a significant continuing growth rate for females where they currently comprise 35.5% of the 20-29 year olds.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDENT INDEBTEDNESS

An important consideration, for most recent graduates of dental school, is how to pay off a huge debt from 8 or more years of college. According to the ADA's Survey Center, in 1999/2000 tuition and fees for first year resident students in the U.S. averaged \$15,653, while non-resident tuition and fees were 55.8% higher at an average of \$24,386. Both of these figures are approximately 25% above the tuition and fees paid just 4 years earlier.

Many graduates of Creighton's dental school have a debt exceeding \$125,000. Many graduates of UNMC's dental college have a debt approaching \$80,000.

With this level of indebtedness, some recent graduates have gone to work for a guaranteed salary at dental clinics in metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Seattle or Phoenix. Annual salaries offered in these cities can be between \$80,000 and \$100,000. Becoming an associate in a practice in Nebraska might pay that same graduate less than \$40,000.

Some graduates opt to join one of the armed forces and receive significant financial assistance while in school, a good income and benefits following graduation and, of course, the opportunity to perform a lot of dentistry.

Some of those who move to a city like Phoenix and receive a 6-figure salary only work in that clinic for 3 or 4 years. If they are frugal, they can pay off much of their indebtedness, then set up a private practice or join a small group. These professionals seldom return to Nebraska.

There are some important financial factors to consider when looking at the dynamics of who attends Nebraska's two dental schools. Since Creighton is a private school, students pay the same tuition regardless of their residency. Creighton's tuition is much higher than a Nebraska resident pays if they attend the University of Nebraska. A non-resident, of course, pays more to attend Nebraska than a resident does, although most out-of-state students qualify for Tuition Scholarships which lower their tuition to in-state rates.

WHAT'S CURRENTLY BEING DONE

In some ways, the answers to Nebraska's dental work force concerns are simple and a few are currently being implemented.

1. In 1999, Nebraska's Rural Health Advisory Commission put dentistry on the same level of financial assistance as medicine. A student, who agrees to practice in an underserved area following graduation, can receive a loan of up to \$15,000 per year. The loan need not be repaid if the graduate remains in an underserved area for at least 4 years. Five students at Nebraska (3 sophomores and 2 freshmen) are receiving assistance. Recent graduates can also receive financial help if an individual or organization, in an underserved area, provides matching funds. A hospital or a service club could be a likely source of such funding.
2. On September 20, 2001, the University of Nebraska's College of Dentistry held its first ever Practice Opportunity Fair. For three and a half hours students could meet and converse with Nebraska dentists who were interested in adding an associate or selling their practice. It was deemed a success by the school and will be held again in 2002. Twenty-five dental offices participated, and more were turned away due to lack of space.
3. In the early 1990's, the University of Nebraska was accepting only 42 freshmen. They are now accepting 45. This is certainly an important factor in working toward building the dental work force in our state. The University of Nebraska may be able to accept several more first year students in the coming years but clinical space, lab space and other factors will not allow for adding too many more students in each class. The key is to work toward retaining more graduates in Nebraska and not merely increasing class size.

As with any problem, it's important to recognize that there is a problem and to educate Nebraska dentists as to the level of the problem. The Nebraska Dental Association (NDA) is certainly an organization that's in a position to educate its members on work force concerns and related problems. Dentists need to be aware of the potential difficulty in finding an associate or selling their practice well in advance of retirement.

The American Dental Association (ADA) has printed several excellent manuals regarding the selling of a practice, hiring/becoming an associate and starting a successful practice. The NDA needs to increase member awareness of these publications. Students and university leaders also need to know about the availability of these publications. The NDA's loan library has all of these manuals. The NDA has a monthly newsletter that is mailed to all members and distributed

to seniors at both schools. This offers a good opportunity to assist dentists and students as to the availability of opportunities in Nebraska.

Each spring the NDA holds its 3-day Annual Session in Lincoln or Omaha. Students of both schools are invited to attend at no cost. This may also be an ideal time and place for students to interact with dentists wanting to hire an associate or sell their practice. In the past, exhibitors consisted of companies who sell dental related products and services. This may be a good time to have a booth in the exhibit area dedicated to distributing information regarding dental opportunities in various parts of Nebraska.

Another important group that can certainly be of assistance in solving work force problems is the American Student Dental Association chapters at both schools. Although many of their members are from outside Nebraska and have plans to return to their home states, they are residing in our state for 4 years. Focusing on educating their members as to the opportunities in rural areas of Nebraska may appeal to enough of them to see some positive results. The NDA has the opportunity to interact with ASDA on a number of occasions. Putting underclassmen in touch with a successful dental practice outside the Lincoln/Omaha area would be a positive, professional experience that could lead to a better awareness of some of the advantages of practicing in a small community.

The deans and administrators at both schools are extremely important to any effort to alleviate work force problems. Their recognition of Nebraska's problems now and in the future are a key to helping address and solve these concerns. Both schools and deans were well represented in the creating of this document; therefore it goes without saying that they are aware of work force concerns in our state. Because the University of Nebraska is supported, in part, by taxes and has more Nebraskans as students, it would seem logical that working with their administration and student leaders, could pay bigger dividends. Having said that, it is interesting and encouraging to note that the first year students (2001-2002) at Creighton had 16 class members from Nebraska, an unusually high number (see addendum #1B).

It may be prudent to make a select few state senators aware of dental work force concerns. Senators on the legislature's Health & Human Services Committee could be apprised of the situation. This would accomplish several things:

1. This is one of the reasons why access to care (especially for Medicaid patients) is a problem in some parts of the state.
2. The legislature needs to continue their support for the Rural Health Advisory Commission.
3. Bring up the possibility of increased support for our 2 dental schools in such a manner as to encourage graduates to practice in underserved Nebraska communities.

Solving the problem will take time and considerable effort on the part of many groups. As challenging as the various solutions may seem, Nebraska has what many midwestern states don't

have. We have two dental schools and a dental association that's willing and eager to work toward solving work force problems.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Continue encouraging both schools to accept a significant number of students from Nebraska.
- B. The Nebraska Dental Association and other interested parties need to encourage dental students to stay in Nebraska following graduation.
- C. Students who leave Nebraska following graduation, especially those who seek specialty degrees or join the military, should be considered potential "recruits". The NDA should "stay in touch" with these graduates.
- D. The NDA and both schools need to support the efforts of the Rural Health Advisory Commission and continue to remind the Commission of the challenges facing Nebraska's dental work force.
- E. Medicaid officials and others at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services need to be informed on a regular basis of workforce concerns. Their assistance may be of value in the legislative arena or in "finding" funds to help recent grads stay in our state.
- F. When possible, dentists in Nebraska need to start making retirement plans several years in advance. They need to be more proactive in seeking out an associate, and then help that person be in a position to buy their practice. The NDA must convey this advice for years to come.
- G. The NDA and component societies of the Association need to increase interaction with dental students. Many of Nebraska's dentists have enjoyed successful careers. Students need to meet and become acquainted with successful Nebraska professionals.
- H. Continue to monitor the practice patterns and locations of dentists in Nebraska with help from both schools and Nebraska's Health and Human Services Department.
- I. Encourage more coordination of services between dental offices and other community health leaders to increase preventive dental knowledge and services. This can include the utilization of water fluoridation to meet Year 2010 goals.
- J. Enhance Medicaid payments, initiate electronic claims filing and remove existing regulatory barriers to expand the number of dental offices willing to treat Medicaid recipients.
- K. Encourage recognition by Medicaid of dental offices that provide significant levels of care to Medicaid patients (i.e.: greater than \$15,000 in claims per year).

- L. Seek ways to provide incentives to dental colleges to recruit and retain dental practitioners for areas in Nebraska with dental shortages.
- M. Increase dental student's exposure to serving underserved populations in the State. This can include learning opportunities in areas outside the Lincoln/Omaha area.

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The Nebraska Dental Association is very appreciative of the time and effort put forth by the following people for their help in creating this document:

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University of Nebraska

Addendum #1A

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Summary of the class:						
Total Students	44	43	43	43	45	45
Male Students	25	28	35	31	29	26
Female Students	19	15	8	12	16	19
Nebraska Residents	31	33	38	27	26	29
Wyoming Residents	2	1	2	3	3	2
North Dakota Residents	1	0	1	3	0	2
South Dakota Residents	2	1	5	5	7	4
Kansas Residents	1	4	5	2	6	4
Colorado Residents	0	0	0	0	0	1
Minnesota Residents	1	0	1	0	0	0
Utah Residents	3	1	0	0	1	0
Idaho Residents	1	0	0	0	1	1
California Residents	0	1	0	1	0	1
Nevada Residents	0	0	0	0	0	1
Florida Residents	1	0	0	0	0	0
New Mexico Residents	1	0	0	0	0	0
Montana Residents	0	1	0	0	0	0
Alaska Residents	0	1	0	0	0	0
Washington Residents	0	0	1	1	0	0
Oregon Residents	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wisconsin Residents	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nebraska residents per class (%)	70%	76%	65%	63%	58%	64%
Nebraska/Contract states residents	77%	79%	72%	77%	65%	73%
Per class						

Graduates from Creighton University
School of Dentistry remaining in Nebraska 1999-2001

Addendum #1B

1999

83 Students graduated

5 remained in Nebraska metropolitan areas after graduation (4 in Omaha, 1 in Valley)

2000

77 Students graduated

8 remained in Nebraska metropolitan areas after graduation (7 in Omaha, 1 in Valley)

2001

82 Students graduated

7 remained in Nebraska metropolitan areas after graduation (all in Omaha)

Nebraska Residents Attending
Creighton University School of Dentistry 2001/2002 Academic Year

Freshman

16 Students- 10 Omaha, 2 Lincoln, 1 Grand Island, 1 Minden, 1 Sidney, 1 Valley

Sophomores

4 Students - 1 Omaha, 1 Broken Bow, 1 Lincoln, 1 Grand Island

Juniors

4 Students - 4 Omaha

Seniors

5 Students – 4 Omaha, 1 La Vista