

Independent business coverage of the entire dental and DPM industries

Benefits begin to reflect mounting research

Carriers Address Links Between Dental and Medical

Dental and medical are coming together, but the eventual extent of the coupling remains to be seen. While dental and multi-line carriers agree that clinical and benefits management integration will continue -- as research increasingly unlocks the ties between the two -- they also agree that it's as yet too early to tell what the final shape of the benefits industry will be. That means, they emphasize, that it's also too early to tell whether dental-only or dental-and-medical carriers will have the advantage when the benefits design dust settles.

The evidence of the close clinical integration of medical and dental care mounts daily. One recent example is a study funded by the Okemos, MI-based Delta Dental of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana -- currently underway at the University of Michigan and the University of Detroit Mercy -- showing preliminarily at least that diabetics with periodontal disease

who receive more frequent professional teeth cleanings are healthier.

Specifically, the Deltas report, "preliminary results show that people with diabetes who have their teeth cleaned professionally four times a year can better manage their blood glucose levels. It appears that for every one-point reduction in those levels, as measured through a blood test, there is a 40% reduction in the risk for diabetic complications of the eye, kidney and nervous system. A one-point reduction also appears to decrease the incidence of heart attacks by 14% and diabetes-related deaths by 21%."

Jed Jacobson, the Deltas' senior vice president of professional services and chief science officer, notes that "if the early findings prove correct, we plan to incorporate coverage of additional cleanings into benefit plan designs for our members with diabetes and periodontal disease, possibly as early as 2007." The

concept of adapting plan design based on scientific evidence was "pioneered in the dental insurance industry" by the Midwest Deltas, a statement asserts, which has led to "major changes in the coverage of many commonly performed procedures, including dental x-rays, fluoride treatment, crown replacement and oral cancer detection."

For example, in 2004, Delta's analysis of continuing high levels of oral cancer led to its decision to make coverage of the brush biopsy, a recently developed tool for early detection and prevention of oral cancer, a standard part of its benefits programs. Other carriers later followed suit, and brush biopsy has become a more or less standard benefit in the industry nationwide.

Jacobson adds: "In addition to continually reviewing scientific research on health from external sources, Delta makes evidence-based policy decisions through an ongoing and extensive analysis of dental treat-

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CA Delta Reports 'Strong' Sales, Sees 1.2M New Members This Year

Delta Dental of California, San Francisco, is becoming a case study in one of the long-held tenets of business: success can be found in focusing on the fundamentals. The holding company system that also includes Delta Dental of Pennsylvania and its affiliates in 15 states and the District of Columbia -- as well as Delta Dental of New York -- has announced "strong performance" during fiscal year 2005.

The enterprise operates under a single, shared management structure

led by CEO and president **Gary D. Radine**. It expects to add more than 1.2 million enrollees this year based on 2005 sales, exceeding 21 million in 2006 once all new business sold becomes effective, while retaining 98% of its prior enrollment. Consolidated gross revenues for the enterprise are estimated at \$4.7 billion.

The secret, says public affairs director **Jeff Album**, is simply doing what you do well.

"Our enterprise is relentlessly

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Coast Installs 'Millions' in Digital Radiography Equipment

In what's being called "a multi-million-dollar agreement," Tampa-based Coast Dental will install Rochester, NY-based Eastman Kodak Company's Kodak RVG 6000 Digital Radiography System into its 107 practices across the southeastern United States, the firms report. The deal, reports **Richard Hirschland**, general manager of Kodak's Health Group, "represents the first large-scale deployment of our RVG 6000 System in the United States."

Coast, which operates in Florida, Georgia, Virginia and Tennessee, "wanted a digital imaging system that equaled or surpassed the quality of film images," says **Michael Smith**, the dental company's chief information officer, "and Kodak delivered." The system features true image resolution, enabling dentists to make complex diagnoses quickly and accurately, he says. With high-

speed USB 2.0 technology, it acquires and displays images in seconds, minimizing the time dentists and patients must wait for results.

Additionally, the system -- the flagship in Kodak's line of digital intraoral imaging systems -- is easy to use and to integrate into practice management software, the parties say. "When we committed to adding digital radiography to our offices, we sought an industry-leading strategic partner with a solid track record for innovation," notes **Tom Marler**, Coast's CEO. "We found that Kodak's collaborative approach is a perfect fit for Coast and for our future plans."

A pilot program Coast initiated to evaluate the Kodak system "showed how it supports our goal of providing enhanced care to patients," adds **Adam Diasti**, DDS, president at Coast PA. "Our dentists gave the system high marks for the instant

availability and clarity of the digital images. The ability to magnify and enhance images also impressed us. That feature will enable our dentists to achieve more accurate diagnoses going forward."

He adds: "Our patients were pleased, too, because they could view the images and take a more proactive role in the treatment planning process. Bottom line: The Kodak system will have a positive impact on not only patient care, but also on our ability to attract dentists, hygienists and support staff to Coast, because they will be able to work with the latest state-of-the-art equipment in dentistry today."

Kodak will assist Coast Dental in the phased installation of the RVG 6000 System, the companies report. Five installations are already in place. The companies also will collaborate on education programs for Coast patients. ■

NCHS Data Show SCHIP Improves Access to Dental Care

States have made "important gains" in removing financial barriers to healthcare since 1997 because of federal legislation establishing the State Children's Health Insurance Program, says a team of researchers from the National Center for Health Statistics and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Indeed, they state in research results presented at the recent 35th Annual Meeting of the American Association for Dental Research, "SCHIP implementation substantially reduced financial barriers for dental care and increased the use of dental services for low-income children in the United States."

The final publication of the study is still under review, notes the NCHS's **Hua Wang**, PhD, "so the entire report cannot be given

out yet." But the abstract was made available at the AADR get-together. "Compared with those children without insurance," a report on it says, "those who obtained public coverage as a result of SCHIP implementation were 21.2% less likely to report unmet dental needs and 49.5% more likely to have visited a dentist within the preceding 6 months."

Indeed, the report says, "those implementation effects were large

enough to result in a measurable effect on access to dental care for the entire low-income population." That access, AADR points out, "is a major problem for low-income children. SCHIP is the most significant expansion of public health insurance since the Medicaid program began in the 1960s."

Until now, no national evaluation of the program has examined the impact of SCHIP on chil-

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