

The Dental Health Equity Issue

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Challenges to delivering oral health care have garnered more attention recently, notably in a front page story in the Washington Post entitled "[The Painful Truth About Teeth](#)". This article highlights the continuing divide between Americans who can afford dental coverage and those who cannot. It also provides insight into a major inequity in health care – the challenge of providing oral health care to the country.

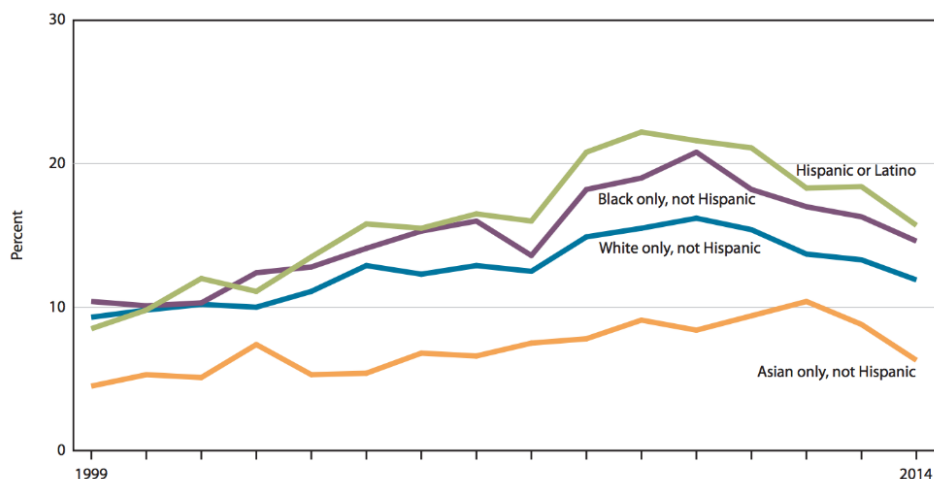
A recent opinion piece by R. Bruce Donoff "[It's time to break down the wall between dentistry and medicine](#)" illustrates the division in the two disciplines. "We cannot drill, fill, and extract our way to better oral and overall health. We need a fundamentally different approach, one that accentuates disease prevention and health management using a multidisciplinary, integrated, and patient-centric approach to overall health. And that means breaking down the wall between dentistry and medicine." To break down this barrier, the Harvard School of Dental Medicine created "[The Initiative to Integrate Oral Health and Medicine](#)." Other institutions have also realized the importance of integrated dental health and primary care. Donoff further notes that, "While inter-professional education has met with some success, inter-professional practice remains elusive."

Data from the [National Health Interview Survey](#) (graphic below) shows the rise of adults not receiving necessary dental care over the years in all populations. The steepest rise in Black and Hispanic populations. A slight dip in this non-receipt is seen around the time that the Affordable Care Act was rolled out. Despite the ACA that expanded coverage to millions of Americans, many were still left without dental coverage and feel that the system has abandoned them.

As part of the Beyond Flexner Alliance's commitment to health equity and inter-professionalism, we are working to incorporate dentists and oral health providers into our membership and oral health issues in our program planning. We would welcome comments on the oral health divide as well as blog submissions for possible posting. Please email us at info@beyondflexner.org for comments and blog submissions.

Nonreceipt of needed dental care due to cost among adults aged 18–64, by race and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999–2014

Source: CDC/NCHS National Health Interview Survey



Scholarly Research

[Oral health equity and unmet dental care needs in a population-based sample: findings from the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin.](#)

American Journal of Public Health, July 2015

[The role of the dental team in promoting health equity.](#)

The British Dental Journal, January 2014

Commentaries

[It's time to break down the wall between dentistry and medicine](#)

R. Bruce Donoff, July 17, 2017

[The Painful Truth About Teeth](#)

The Washington Post, May 2017

[The Unexpected Political Power of Dentists](#)

Mary Jordan, July 2017

[Who Can't Get Dental Care?](#)

The Pew Charitable Trusts, May 2017

[The Devastating Effects of Dental Inequality in America](#)

Adam Gaffney, New Republic, May 2017

[Our Teeth Are Making Us Sick](#)

The New York Times, May 2017

[Why Don't We Treat Teeth Like the Rest of Our Bodies?](#)

The Atlantic, September 2014

Videos

[Call for Action: Reducing Oral Health Disparities](#)

UCL Dental Public Health, June 2016

[Using Data to Advance Oral Health Equity - Webinar](#)

Dentaquest Oral Health Collaboration Team, January 2015

News

[A Community Framework for Addressing Social Determinants of Oral Health for Low-Income Populations](#)

Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc., January 2017

[Oral Health Literacy as a Pathway to Health Equity](#)

U.S. National Oral Health Alliance, June 2012

Announcements

[35th GLMA Annual Conference on LGBT Health: From Resistance to Resilience: Filling the Gaps in LGBT Healthcare and Research](#)

September 13-16, 2017- Philadelphia, PA

[People, Power, Purpose \[P3\] Summit 2017, The National Collaborative for Health Equity](#)

September 29, 2017-Washington D.C.

[The Root Cause Coalition Second Annual National Summit on the Social Determinants of Health](#)

October 9-10, 2017-Louisville, KY

[Transforming Care Conference 2016 Midwest Conference on LGBTQ Health Equity and HIV/AIDS](#)

October 19-20, 2017-Columbus, OH

[National Network for Oral Health Access \(NNOHA\) Annual Conference](#)

November 12-15, 2017-San Diego, CA