

DENTAL STUDENT ROTATIONS AT A FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTER IN NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota has no dental school to encourage student enrollment. Recognizing the need to address dental workforce shortages, and barriers to recruiting new dental professionals to the state, the North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services Oral Health Program (OHP) and the North Dakota Area Health Education Center financially support dental rotations at one Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in North Dakota: Spectra Health.

Spectra Health

Spectra Health is an FQHC in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The group has been in operation since 2004 and strives to ensure high-quality and affordable services are available to everyone in the community. Spectra recognizes the importance of integrated care where behavioral health, oral health, and primary care team members work together with the patient.

Dental Services Provided at Spectra Health

- Cleanings
- Sealants
- Fillings
- Extractions
- Composites
- Night guards
- Selective root canals
- Child-safe nitrous gas
- Urgent dental care
- Restorative crowns
- Partial dentures



Evaluation: Key Findings from Student Rotations in 2022

- Spectra Health hosted four dental students in 2022 who provided care for 310 patients covered by medical assistance and completed 273 restorative dental services.
- Students reported positive experiences attributed to the program staff, the integrated care setting, and the overall engagement with the local dental community.
- Students highly recommend this rotation for other dental students: “I thought working there was incredible! It was good experience.”

Care Provided by Dental Students

When the program began in 2017, Spectra Health providers were still determining how best to integrate students into the care rotation and were working with billing to determine how to cover the cost of care, as well as track provided services.

Dental student rotations prove to be not only advantageous for the students, but they also provide the health center the opportunity to provide additional services and reduce wait times for patients seeking preventive care. The table below shows the number of services provided by students during the dental rotations with Spectra Health. Most patients who received care from the dental students were covered by medical assistance (MA), Medicaid.

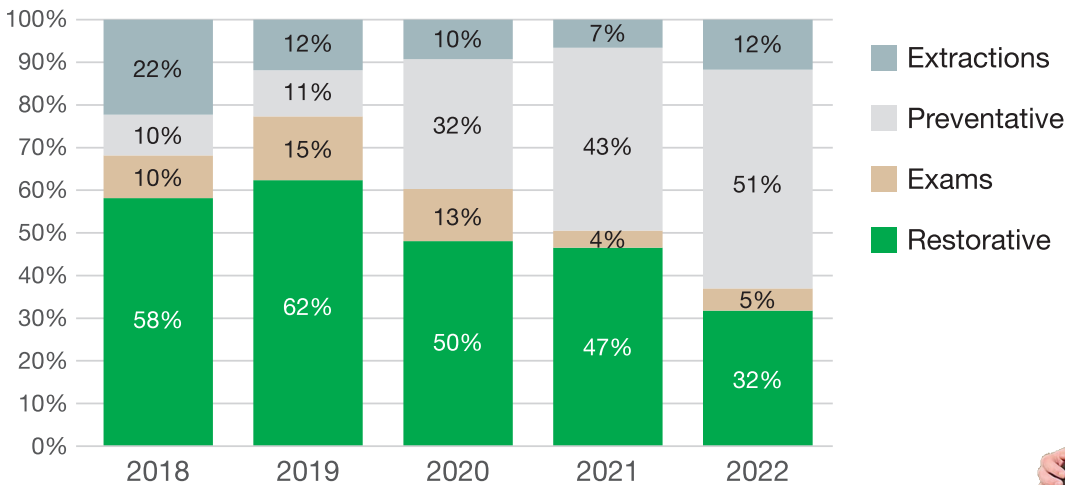
Dental Student Procedure Report

Year	Dental Students	Restorative Services	Dental Exams	Preventative Services	Extractions	Number of MA patients	Total services billed to MA
2017*	1	7	14	0	8	NA	NA
2018	3	128	22	21	49	NA	NA
2019	4	358	86	62	68	394	\$61,035
2020	2	161	41	102	18	282	\$35,649
2021	3	220	19	203	31	208	\$23,409
2022	4	273	45	440	101	310	\$37,193

*2017: Unsure how to bill and track; this student "closed out" procedures under the provider, and not self. Not reliable data.

Students have traditionally reported a greater number of restorative services than preventative. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in 2020), dental students began to contribute to reducing the backlog of pediatric patients in need of preventive dental care. In 2018 and 2019, preventative services were only 10% and 11%, respectively, of the care provided by students; by 2022, 51% of dental student services were preventative.

Percentage of Services Provided by Dental Students, by Year



Dental Student Experiences

Third-year dental students were from Milwaukee, Wis.; Bismarck, N.D.; Little Rock, Ark.; and, Sioux Falls, S.D. Students participated in interviews before and after their rotation experiences.

Choosing North Dakota and Spectra Health

Spectra Health continues to be a popular rotation. Students shared they had learned about the opportunity because of students from previous rotations. One student chose to conduct their rotation at Spectra Health because of their previous experience working there as a dental assistant.

This rotation is also popular because of the provided housing and reduced expense to the student.

Two of those interviewed shared that they selected this rotation to gain experience working with different patient groups.

Following the rotation, all students voiced interest working for an FQHC, though most preferred primarily working in a private setting with days assigned to work at a neighboring FQHC. Private practice was desirable because students voiced interest in owning their own practice, and the income that can be generated as a private practice provider.

All students enjoyed their time in North Dakota, but few of them desired to return to North Dakota to practice. Their interests centered around wanting to work closer to home and their families.

One student also noted the weather as a deterrent. "It was so dang cold! Polar vortex was when we were there and for me that was really bitter."

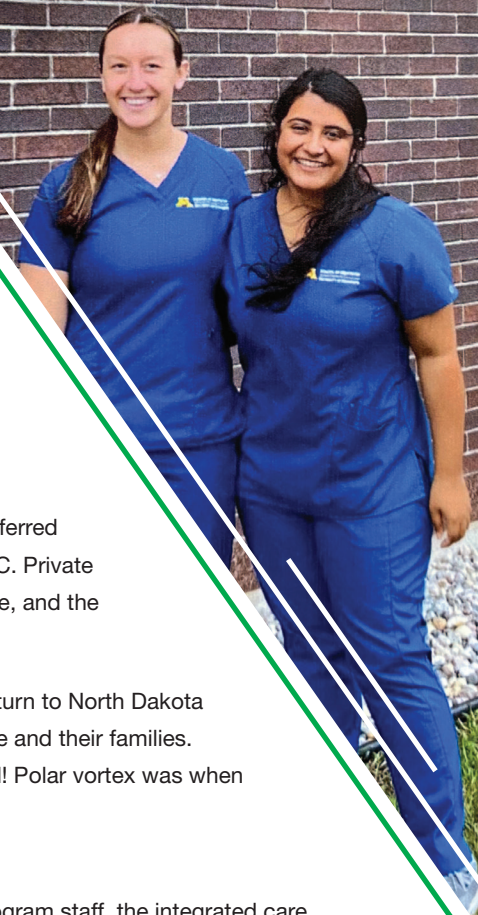
Experiences During Rotation

All students reported positive experiences attributed to the program staff, the integrated care setting which allowed for smooth referral to behavioral health and primary care services, and the overall engagement and integration into the local dental community. The program provided housing, dinners, and networking opportunities with private practice dentists. The students also spoke positively about their role as dental professionals within the health center.

Spectra Health allowed them to function as a lead dental provider, overseeing other dental professionals and providing patient care as a colleague and member of the Spectra Health care team. Students enjoyed the staff, understood the billing, learned about loan repayment and other professional topics through guest lectures, and appreciated the numerous networking opportunities.

Highlight of the Experience

"Being able to work with all the staff, and having a dental assistant, and being able to collaborate with other dentists and be able to be in a real office! This was different from the school setting where we don't have that help or the real-world opportunities."



Recommendations

Students did not share any recommendations for improvement, but instead highlighted aspects of the program that should be replicated for other dental rotations. Students appreciated the large patient case load, the welcoming and safe space created by Dr. Jackie Nord to ask questions and work collaboratively, and the opportunities to network outside of clinic hours. Dr. Nord not only provided clinical expertise, but also shared experiences and lessons related to time management and patient care planning.

Students all mention Dr. Nord as a key component of the program's success. The OHP should work with Dr. Nord to develop resources on how to serve as a mentor and colleague for dental students completing rotations. Dr. Nord may also be a strong advocate and resource as the OHP seeks to expand the program and engage other FQHC dental providers in North Dakota.

Many students spoke of the opportunities to network and even to attend the annual North Dakota Dental Association meeting. It is important to maintain funding to support students engaging in local events and dinners with other dental professionals in the area to promote recruitment of dental professionals to North Dakota. Finally, with the program growing in popularity, Spectra Health (and others in North Dakota) should prioritize dental students who are from the region, recognizing that students share a desire to return "home" to open practice.

As one student put it, "Thank you for this experience! It was really fun."

Learn More



spectrahealth.org/services/dental/



North Dakota
Oral Health Program
It's **All Connected!**

hhs.nd.gov/health/oral-health-program

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