

Policy on the Role of Pediatric Dentists as Both Primary and Specialty Care Providers

Latest Revision

2018

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Purpose

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) emphasizes that health care providers and other interested third parties must recognize the dual role that pediatric dentists play in the provision of professional preventive and therapeutic oral health care, which includes both primary and specialty care services.

Methods

This policy was developed by the Council on Clinical Affairs and adopted in 2003. This is a revision of the last version, revised in 2008 and reaffirmed in 2013. It was based on a review of *Accreditation Standards for Advanced Specialty Training Programs in Pediatric Dentistry*¹ and the AAPD position paper on the role of pediatric dentists as primary and specialty care providers.² An electronic search was conducted using the terms: pediatric dentist, pediatric specialist, primary care provider, dual care provider, and specialty care provider.

Background

“Pediatric dentistry is an age-related specialty that provides both primary and comprehensive preventive and therapeutic oral health needs for infants and children through adolescence, including those with special health care needs.”¹ The American Dental Association, the American Academy of General Dentistry, and the AAPD all recognize the pediatric dentist as both a primary care provider and specialty care provider. The dual role of pediatric dentists is similar to that of pediatricians, gynecologists, and internists in medicine. Within the medical profession, clinicians and third-party payors recognize these physicians in a dual role and have designed payment plans to accommodate this situation.

The AAPD respects the rights of employers to negotiate health care benefits for their employees. Sometimes, third-party payors do not recognize pediatric dentists as primary care providers. This position restricts access to pediatric dentists for children who have reached a predetermined age and/or who may be best served by specialized oral health care providers and counseling. In some instances, this restriction necessitates a specialty referral to a pediatric dentist prior to evaluation.

Policy statement

The AAPD recognizes that infants, children, adolescents, and individuals with special health care needs have the right to quality oral health care. The AAPD encourages third-party payors to recognize pediatric dentists as both primary and specialty oral health care providers and to refrain from age-related restrictions when a parent or referring clinician desires to utilize the services and expertise of a pediatric dentist to establish a dental home or for limited specialized care.

References

1. American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation. Accreditation standards for advanced specialty education programs in pediatric dentistry. Chicago, Ill.; 2017. Available at: “<https://www.ada.org/-/media/CODA/Files/ped.pdf?la=en>”. Accessed March 16, 2018.
2. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Council on Dental Benefits Programs. Position paper: The role of pediatric dentists as primary and specialty care providers. Chicago, Ill.: American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2002.

ABBREVIATION

AAPD: American Academy Pediatric Dentistry.