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TITLE: Understanding Oral-Systemic Health and Culture: Bringing It All Together

Background: Significant oral health inequities persist for vulnerable and underserved populations, particularly American Indians. American Indians experience poorer oral health than the overall U.S. population across the life cycle. This population faces barriers to achieving optimal oral health based on a complex array of geographic, economic, and cultural issues which are distinct to their population. . Understanding these barriers is the first step to addressing oral health inequities, as well as the important connection between oral health and overall health.

Objectives: The aim of this presentation is to describe the experiences of allied health students collaborating with dental students and faculty in a community outreach program to better understand the oral-systemic health needs of a local American Indian population.

Methods: Faculty and students from Bouvé College of Health Sciences at Northeastern University participated in Harvard School of Dental Medicine's community outreach to the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Health students from nursing, pharmacy, and behavioral health, collaborated with dental students in planning, coordinating and implementing a community outreach to the tribal community. Allied health students teamed with dental students in conducting oral health screenings, risk assessments, and health histories. Students interacted with tribal community members, including children, adolescents, adults and older adults, providing oral-systemic health information and counseling about healthy personal behaviors.

Results: The community outreach program enhanced students' understanding about oral-systemic health, diverse barriers to achieving optimal oral health, and the importance of cultural humility in addressing oral health inequities for American Indians. Building trusting relationships with the community and team members was foundational to this program's success.

Implications: Bringing together students and faculty across health professions to engage in community outreach is an effective interprofessional education strategy to promote cultural humility in improving oral-systemic health for vulnerable and underserved individuals, communities, and populations.