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CHIP Title: Decreasing Decay Rate in Children under Three by Introducing Early Oral Health Education in Pregnant Mothers in Safety Net Clinics

Project Description:

Dental Decay is the most common chronic disease among school aged children. In fact, dental disease is more common than childhood asthma. By the time children go to school, 50% of them have already experienced tooth decay in California. As a result, children miss school, learn less, are in pain, or end up in the emergency room due to oral infections. Research, and reports support this position (California Children's Report Card gave a C- for Oral Health Care in 2020). Treating decay in very young children is very challenging. The good news is that decay is a totally preventable disease. Using a multi-disciplinary approach for early education and intervention with expecting parents, I expect children to have a reduced rate of dental decay by the time their children are 3 years old.

Several efforts to decrease dental decay have already been implemented. Safety net clinics, such as Marin Community Clinics have treated children from the moment, they have their first tooth. Expecting parents are referred early on for dental care. Despite all these efforts, we are still seeing dental decay as a chronic disease in very young children. Our population is not completely aware of the etiology of this disease and the lack of understanding and knowledge is producing little effect in preventing tooth decay.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned:

- Mothers that were interviewed about their views and knowledge on how to prevent tooth decay wished they had known the etiology of decay much sooner to have made different choices for their children to prevent tooth decay. They believed they would have been more successful having known the why.
- Medical personnel support the plan of adding an educational component to pregnant patients in addition to referring them for dental care.
- Educational settings should be conducive to create a relaxed environment to learn and exchange ideas. The dental chair is not the best medium to absorb and reflect on oral health education.
- Written materials and videos communicating key points can change an expecting parent's approach to preventing tooth decay after their baby is born. Tracking this new approach can help document rates of dental decay through time.

Next Steps:

- Will continue monitoring the key point messages to expectant parents by utilizing tools such as QR codes when they get the educational materials in the medical setting.
- These parents and babies will be followed-up for a period of three years to see the rate of decay.
- I will look to replicate these steps in more safety net clinics.