

I am a dental hygienist in the school based health center at New Britain High School. I have been practicing in private practice for twenty one years, but these last two years in the school based health center have been the most rewarding for me. The students that I treat are in need of major dental services. Many of them can not get to the dentist due to lack of transportation, lack of adequate family support or fear of the dental chair. The school based health center is an ideal setting for these students to get the adequate care needed.

Transportation is always an issue when making a point for the school based health centers. Most of the students who use our dental services are on the state insurance plan. As everyone knows, the dental providers who accept state insurance patients are very limited. Many need to travel to Hartford, East Hartford and surrounding towns to get an appointment. Students and their families are relieved to see that we have dental services at the health center. We can provide all the routine dental services and we can refer to our care coordinator to get other services needed.

Family related problems are also a big factor for lack of care. I've had more than a few students tell me their parents won't follow through with making appointments for further dental treatment that is needed, or their parent is absent from their lives and they are living with another family member until they return. We have many of our patients in the DCF system whose case workers call to get them seen at the school based health clinic. With documented parental/guardian permission, these students can receive treatment and an evaluation is sent home to the parent/guardian regarding the work that was done, and what is needed to be done.

Having a total health clinic based out of the school helps students gain access and information about all health issues. They gain education about getting healthy and staying healthy. Students that come to see me, petrified of the dental office, feel a sense of calmness when they leave. School is familiar to them. They feel secure in their own setting. We can explain everything, we've gotten to know them through other services that have helped them, and they understand we are here because we care for them.

My two years in the public health setting have been the best years of my career. I have gained a sense of compassion and understanding for the students and families who are struggling with life's daily routines. I feel so blessed to be able to help in some small way. From my special needs student that was able to have her first dental cleaning with out being sedated, to my student who wants to go into dental hygiene after talking with me at his cleaning appointment, each one has made an impact on my life. The school based health centers are an essential part of our school. The issues in today's society make it essential for them to be a part of any school district.

Respectfully submitted,  
Laura Foran R.D.H.