

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

Research on Capitol Hill

Browse Undergraduate Research Events

3-5-2019

The Effect of Dental Therapists on Access to Dental Care

Jacob Caldwell

Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/roch>



Part of the [Finance and Financial Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caldwell, Jacob, "The Effect of Dental Therapists on Access to Dental Care" (2019). *Research on Capitol Hill*. Paper 124.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/roch/124>

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Browse Undergraduate Research Events at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research on Capitol Hill by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



The Effect of Dental Therapists on Access to Dental Care

Jacob M. Caldwell
Utah State University

Dr. William F. Shughart II
Utah State University

Introduction

Oral health is an important indicator of overall individual health and general well-being. Unfortunately, there is a lack of dental care availability and access in many parts of the United States. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, as of December 31, 2018 there were nearly 6,000 Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) in the US. Around 58 million people live in these shortage areas and it is estimated that over 10,000 practitioners are necessary to meet the needs of these populations.

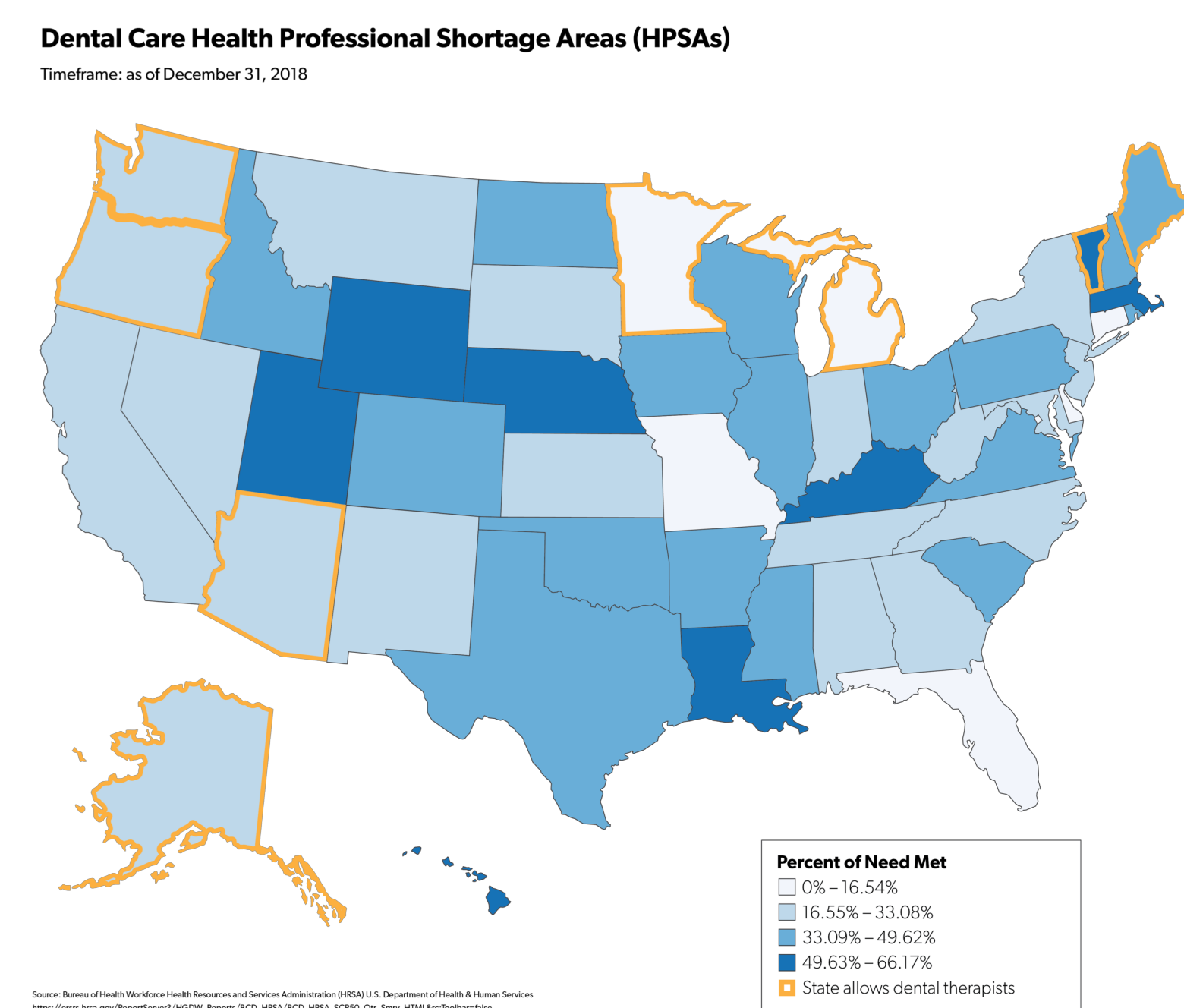
Occupational licensing, or permission from the government to provide dental care, is one factor that may affect costs of and access to care. This research addresses one of the major issues facing Americans seeking dental care today — lack of access due to both costs and limited availability of qualified caregivers.

Methodology

We conducted a literature review and performed a policy analysis based on previous studies on this subject.

- We reviewed literature examining the effects of occupational licensing and the impacts of dental therapists in the US and other countries.
- Our analysis of existing research found that “increased licensing restrictiveness did not improve dental health, but it did raise the prices of basic dental services.” (Kleiner, 2000)

Figure 1- Professional Shortage Areas



We sort the states into quartiles based on the percentage of the health professional shortage area needs that have been met.

Study conducted with funding from the USU Center for Growth and Opportunity with assistance from the USU Economics and Finance Department.

Dental Therapists

- Dental therapists are mid-level providers of dental care similar to a physician assistant.
- They work under dentist supervision and perform about 80 simple procedures (compared to over 400 for a dentist), but the scope of their practice varies by state.
- They require only a fraction of the training a dentist receives.
- This helps lower costs for consumers.

Figure 2- Dental Quality and Restrictiveness

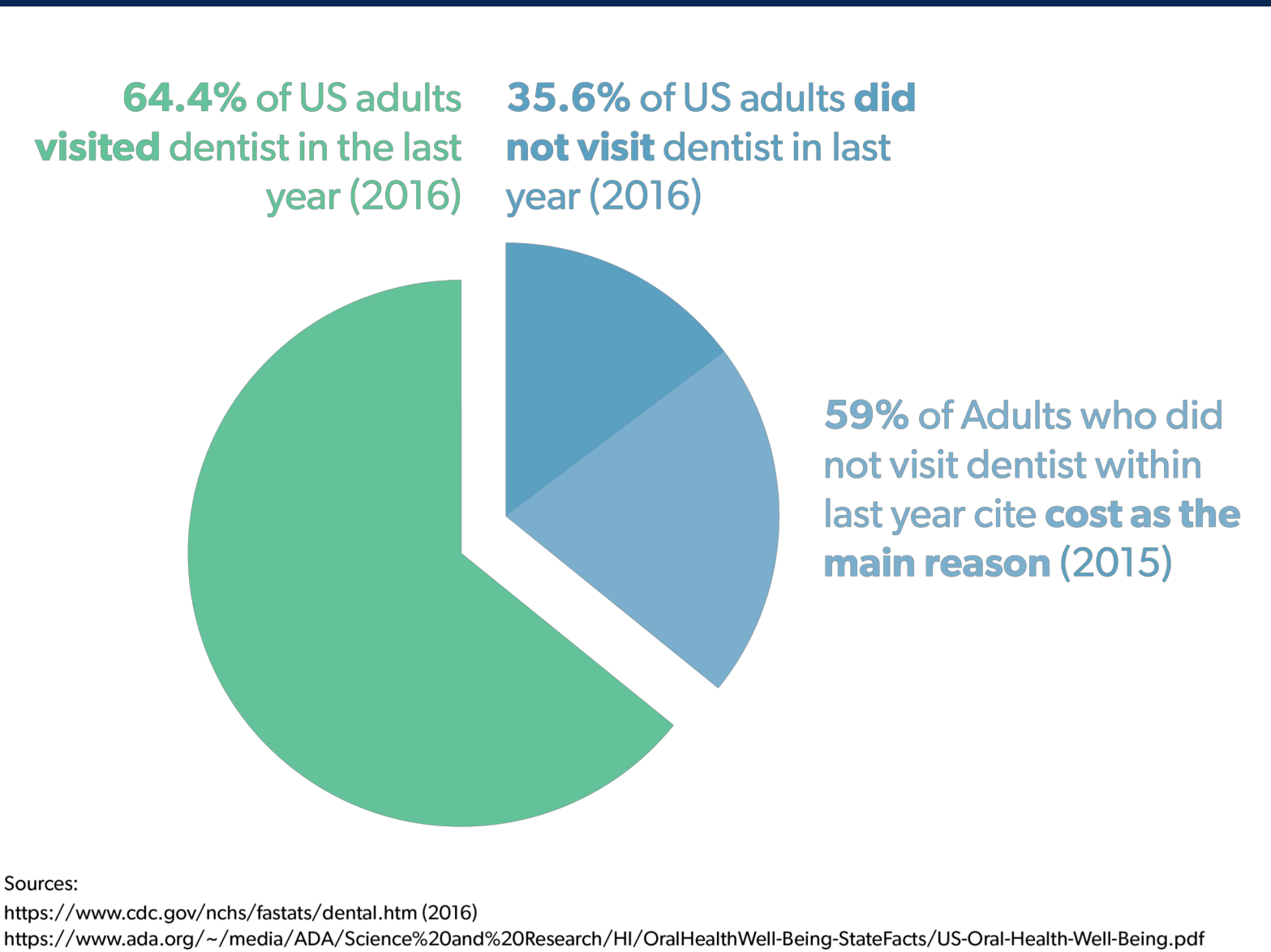
A. States with Highest Dental Quality					
Lowest Weighted Total Deterioration			Lowest Weighted Untreated Deterioration		
Rank	State	State Restrictiveness Index	Rank	State	State Restrictiveness Index
1	Rhode Island	Medium	1	Rhode Island	Medium
2	Wisconsin	Medium	1	Wisconsin	Medium
3	Utah	Medium	1	Vermont	Medium
4	Iowa	Medium	1	Nebraska	Medium
5	Missouri	Medium	5	Utah	Medium

B. States with Lowest Dental Quality					
Highest Weighted Total Deterioration			Highest Weighted Untreated Deterioration		
Rank	State	State Restrictiveness Index	Rank	State	State Restrictiveness Index
1	Hawaii	High	1	Idaho	Medium
2	Connecticut	Medium	1	Alaska	Low
3	Alaska	Low	1	Minnesota	Medium
4	Idaho	Medium	1	Kentucky	Low
5	Arizona	Medium	5	Wyoming	Medium

Kleiner, Morris M., & Robert T. Kudrle. October 2000. Does Regulation Affect Economic Outcomes? The Case of Dentistry*. The Journal of Law & Economics. Retrieved from: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/467465>

Kleiner and Kudrle rate each state's dental health and licensing restrictiveness and compare the states with the highest and lowest dental health.

Figure 3- Adults that Visited the Dentist Within the Last Year



According to the CDC not everyone visits the dentist regularly. The ADA finds cost is one of the main reasons.

Conclusions

There is an evident need for greater access to dental care at lower prices in the US. One possible solution is to reform regulation to allow dental therapists to practice. There is not evidence that dental therapists lead to worse health outcomes. Similar to welfare benefits from reforming occupational licensing in other industries, reforming regulation to allow dental therapists could increase access to dental care opportunities for poor or underserved communities in the US.

