

Social Work and Pediatric Dentistry: A Research Partnership

Kiran Ranganath, an Eastman Dental Pediatric Dentistry Resident, works closely with Social Work. Dr. Ranganath, who has always had an interest in public health, collaborated with Social Work on two research projects, one while an AEGD resident and the other during his Pediatric residency. Dr. Ranganath utilized data from a Social Work grant funded project, The Dental Home for Children Project, for his research. Both projects resulted in presentations at the Rochester Section AADR; and one was accepted for presentation at the annual National Oral Health Conference in April 2010.



Why is the social work component important in dentistry?

Many of the patients we serve have psychosocial issues and challenges that can be a detriment to health care. I consult with Social Work when treating patients who miss appointments yet have untreated dental disease, or who do not have insurance, or who struggle with family issues, systems issues, and barriers to care, such as unreliable transportation, insufficient food, shelter, or clothing, and cultural or language differences.

Eastman Dental's Social Worker collaborates with residents to address and ultimately help close the gaps in patient care. In addition, I partnered with Social Work for both of my research projects.

How did you become interested in dentistry?

There was not much awareness of dentistry in India where I grew up. Unfortunately, I needed some dental work as a child. When visiting the dentist, I was fascinated by the gadgets. And I enjoyed my dentist's personality and looked forward to oral health care appointments. I wondered why the other children were afraid to visit the dentist. I still am in contact with the dentist who performed my first root canal on one of my primary molars when I was a child. He became a family friend and was so influential during my early years, that I decided early on that I wanted to become a dentist. I attended Dental School in a rural town named Bijapur, in India. We have many medical doctors in my family; I am the first dentist, and the only dentist to date.

Why do you want to be a pediatric dentist?

As a Dental Health Resident at NYS DOH Bureau of Dental Health, I had the opportunity to make site visits to school-based dental sealant programs, and to work on the NYS Oral Health Plan, as well as Oral Health Guidelines for Pregnant Women and Children. I recognized the existence of oral health disparities and the need for, yet lack of providers to treat children. Following my two year program, during my AEGD residency at Eastman, I worked at the school-based community dental clinic at School #17, providing dental care to both adults and children. I found that working with children was very rewarding. I was able to educate families and focus on prevention. Treating children was enjoyable and helped me realize that I wanted to specialize in Pediatric Dentistry.

Describe your experience with Eastman Dental.

I feel that our program is well rounded. I have been exposed to the complexities of treating medically compromised children, and I have gained good clinical experience. We have excellent faculty, and I always feel supported. Having an on-site Social Worker, along with skilled staff and a helpful administrator, has made working in Pediatric Dentistry a great experience.

What are your post-residency plans?

I have always been interested in serving the community and hope to become a faculty member of Community Dentistry and Oral Disease Prevention at Eastman Dental.