

Karen O’Rear, RDH, RN, BSN



Karen O’Rear, RDH, RN, BSN, graduated from Taft College’s first Dental Hygiene class. Dual licensure as a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Public Health Nurse allows her an opportunity to interact with both dental and medical professionals. After working in a private practice dental office, Karen’s eyes were opened to the multitude of children in a dental crisis when she began her career in public health. As a result of these children, Karen’s focus has been on educating clients, promotion of age one dental referrals and preventive oral health measures. Her future goals include training more medical providers so they are more confident and comfortable assessing the oral cavity and thinking that the mouth is part of the body instead of a separate entity.

“Educate at every opportunity”

Education

Associate Degree (Dental Hygiene): Taft College
Bachelor of Science in Nursing: Univ. of Phoenix
Associate Degree (Nursing): Bakersfield College

Personal/Program Awards and Recognitions

Instituting the Kern County Department of Public Health’s first fluoride varnish program and training Public Health Nurses to be the first in the state to apply fluoride varnish in the home setting. Appointed as a Taft College Dental Hygiene Advisory Board member. Certificate of recognition as a nominee for the Kern County Department of Public Health’s Nurse of the Year in both 2007 and 2008.

Primary function in public health position

Supervising a dental program for young children needing dental education and treatment. Educating medical staff regarding the importance of oral health and training them in the techniques of applying fluoride varnish. Overseeing staff, budgets, reports and collaborating with community organizations. Campaigning for increasing the number of age one dental referrals.

What experiences prepared you for your work in public health?

Understanding the importance of patient education and familiarity with dental/medical terminology and procedures.

What is the most enjoyable aspect of dental public health?

Seeing children relieved of pain. Pain doesn’t usually happen overnight and many children suffer for months before being brought to our attention.

Proudest public health accomplishment

Dental decay is probably the most common type of neglect seen by our Public Health Nurses so we trained them in our new fluoride varnish program. These nurses are now applying varnish during home visits with children in their caseload and to children during immunization clinics.

Public Health employer/branch/department and official job title

Kern County Department of Public Health, Child Health and Disability Program and Treatment Program Manager, overseeing the Treatment Program - Dental Component, funded by First 5 Kern.

Contact Information

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