



## OBJECTIVES

- To describe the purpose of Med-Peds residency programs
- To conceptualize the proposed development of a combined training program to expand the dental workforce
- Identify populations in dental health professions shortage areas

## ISSUES

As of 2024, approximately 57 million Americans live in dental health professional shortage areas and about 67% of those shortage areas are in rural communities. (3) Among dental professionals, limited clinical experience in managing the varied dental needs of rural and underserved patients limits the services available to this population. **There is a need for practitioners who are capable of whole-person care across the lifespan.**

In the medical profession, combined residency programs in internal medicine and pediatrics (Med-Peds) have been created to train providers who are capable of life-span care. Graduates of these programs often become hospitalists who provide comprehensive medical care to underserved and rural populations. (5)

In dentistry, several fellowship programs focus exclusively on geriatrics, special health care needs (SHCN), or hospital dentistry.

## HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREAS

[illegible]

## DISCUSSION

The number of adults with developmental and acquired disabilities is growing and there are not enough general dentists treating special health care needs patients to meet the increased demand.

Those patients whose medical, physical, psychological, cognitive, or social situations make it necessary to modify normal dental routines in order to provide dental treatment for that individual.

These individuals include, but are not limited to, people with developmental disabilities, cognitive impairment, complex medical conditions, significant physical limitations, and/or other vulnerable populations.

This population group also may have difficulty finding dentists and have to travel long distances to obtain dental care

Currently, there is a need for practitioners who are capable of whole person care across the lifespan.

Among dental professionals, limited clinical experience in the management of the varied needs of rural and underserved patients may adversely limit the services available to this population. Very few training programs exist that prepare dentists to provide comprehensive care without referral for this population.

## DISCUSSION

In the medical field, Med-Peds physicians can synthesize their clinical knowledge into care for patients spanning the spectrum from birth until death.<sup>(5)</sup>

Because of their dual training, Med-Peds physicians are uniquely qualified to care for adolescent patients, particularly children with complex and chronic conditions as they transition to adulthood.<sup>(5)</sup>

The General Practice Residency (GPR) program is designed for advanced clinical and didactic training in general dentistry with intensive hospital experience at the postdoctoral level.

GPR programs provide instruction and experience in the delivery of care to a wide range of ambulatory and hospitalized patients. This training and exposure prepares dentists to obtain privileges at local hospitals once in private practice. (4)

GPR residents rotate through a variety of services including general medicine, general surgery and anesthesiology. Each program also includes advanced training and clinical experience in preventive dentistry, periodontics, restorative dentistry, endodontics, and oral surgery. (4)

Pediatric Dentistry is an age-defined branch of dentistry that provides both primary and comprehensive preventive and therapeutic oral health care for infants and children through adolescence, including those with special health care needs.<sup>(4)</sup>

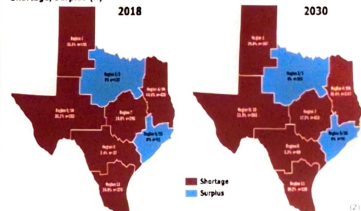
In dentistry, currently, there are several fellowship programs focused exclusively on either geriatrics, SHCN, or hospital dentistry. In addition, established pediatric residencies train specialists to provide dental care for children up to age twelve. This leads to fragmented care, particularly for patients in underserved and rural areas.

Unlike the Med-Peds program, the dental profession has no training program that combines these components (pediatrics, adults, geriatric care) to train dentists who are capable of providing comprehensive primary dental care across the lifespan. Training programs are needed that can overcome these limitations and meet the need for primary dental care.

### Map of All Dentist Shortage by Region, 2018 and 2030

In both 2018 and 2030, North Texas (Region 2/3) and the Gulf Coast (Region 6/55) are the only regions where the supply of all dentists is projected to exceed demand, indicated in blue in the figure below.

Figure 5. Percent of All Dentist Demand Exceeding Supply and FTE Shortage/Surplus (n)



## POSITION

We propose a comprehensive 4-year residency program that combines two years of general dentistry with a third and fourth year of pediatric dental residency. Ultimately, the objectives include providing comprehensive care in community-based settings, hospital settings, institutional settings, and healthcare deserts.

## CONCLUSION

The creation of general practice - pediatric dentistry combined training programs holds the potential for creating a dental workforce capable of meeting the varied needs of patients in underserved areas.

## REFERENCES

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2 <https://itkcon.org/communication/data-dashboard/access-to-care>  
3 <https://data.hhs.gov/topics/health-workforce/care-storage-areas>  
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### National Summary

