

# Dental Therapists

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# Important Ideas

- People from the underserved community
- Two years of training after high school
- Preventive care, basic restorative and extraction of mobile and primary teeth
- General supervision

# Quality of Care

- What is quality care? Not clearly defined
- I think we can agree:
  - No care is poor quality
- Studies indicate care comparable to dentists within the limited scope of practice



# Why do this?

- Recent work in Native communities
  - > 90% of people have untreated decay
  - Significant periodontal disease is common
  - Oral lesions prevalent at twice the rate of other studies (smokeless tobacco)
  - In this environment, there is a dentist to patient ratio of 1 to 3,000+

# Why Not Just Prevention?

- Fluoride varnish will not fix decayed teeth – treatment is needed
- Education has been shown to be marginally effective
- Must find new ways to promote behavioral change – motivational interviewing
- Must also treat problems that exist now

# Why New Mexico?

- Two hours from here – possibly the highest rates of early childhood decay in the world
- Emergencies defined differently
- Managing dentists worried that more patients will put them “over the edge”
- Young and inexperienced dentists parade through – the dental assistants are the constancy