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Published article focuses on unmet health care needs of Medicaid-eligible children

WICHITA, KS – Nearly 40 percent of Medicaid-eligible children -- an estimated 8.4 million children -- don't have any kind of health coverage, according to an article published in this month's Journal of the American Dental Association that was co-authored by an associate professor at the KU School of Medicine-Wichita.

And while children with Medicaid coverage were more likely to use health care services, it did not improve Medicaid-eligible children's general or oral health and did not decrease the unmet treatment needs for the poorest children, the article, "A Comparison of medical and dental outcomes for Medicaid-insured and uninsured Medicaid-eligible children," reported.

"This finding is not surprising because other issues, such as transportation, inability to get to a dental office, taking time off from work and finding child care, are additional factors that affect access and predict health and use of health care services," the article said. "In addition, provider availability and finding a provider willing to accept Medicaid are issues, particularly in dentistry."

The article was co-authored by Monica Fisher, DDS, MS, MPH, PHD,

Associate Professor and Director of the Dental Public Health Research in Preventative Medicine and Public Health at the KU School of Medicine-Wichita. It was also written by Ana Karina Mascarenhas, BDS, MPH, DrPH, Professor and Director of the Division of Dental Public Health in the Department of Health Policy and Health Services Research at the Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine at Boston University. It was published in JADA's November issue, released today.

Dr. Fisher and Dr. Mascarenhas conducted a study based on their analysis of data from nearly 2,500 Medicaid-eligible children ages 2 to 16 years old who participated in the 1999-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Their study found that the number of Medicaid-eligible uninsured children increased sharply from 27 percent in the 1988-1994 NHANES study to nearly 40 percent according to data from the most recent study.

Dr. Fisher and Dr. Mascarenhas examined the health outcomes and treatment needs for the two childhood diseases that affect the most children in the U.S.: cavities and asthma. The children who were included in the study came from families with incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

Among the study's other findings:

- Children covered by Medicaid were more likely to have an annual physician visit than were uninsured Medicaid-eligible children.
- Children 9 to 16 years old who were covered by Medicaid were more likely to have an annual dentist visit than were uninsured Medicaid-eligible children in the same age group.
- Children 2 to 8 years old who were covered by Medicaid were no more or less likely to have an annual dentist visit than uninsured Medicaid –eligible children in the

same age group.

“Thus, the dental profession can be commended for improving access to care for older children with Medicaid coverage,” the article said. “However, more work is needed to improve oral health outcomes by decreasing unmet treatment needs, especially for preschool-aged and younger children, and families with lower income levels.”

To view the article, please visit <http://jada.ada.org>.

To schedule an interview with Dr. Fisher at the KU School of Medicine-Wichita, contact Joe Rodriguez at (316) 293-2643 or (316) 871-1235.

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