

# Great News for MO Infants, Toddlers

by CRAIG S. HOLLANDER DDS, MS

**A**lmost 10 years ago, I was looking for a program that was advocating for the Age 1 Dental Visit and came across the Points of Light (POL) project which began in Michigan in 2004. I wanted to duplicate the program and bring it to Missouri so that parents were able to find dentists willing to screen their infant by the child's first birthday. While the program began as a way to help parents, pediatricians and family practitioners find dental providers for infants, it later expanded so that OB/GYNs could reinforce the importance of seeking dental care for expectant mothers, because there always has been misinformation concerning the safety of dental visits while pregnant.

There was no cost incurred by the dentist to participate, and dentists were able to charge their full dental fee. At its peak, there were more than 80 Missouri dentists who had signed up as a POL provider. This corresponded to at least one dentist in 51 of the 114 counties in the state. As time went by, the POL administrators (based in Michigan) put the program on the back burner and stopped updating the website and registering new dentists who wanted to sign up. Finally, in early February, I received notice that POL was shutting down completely and disabling the website, thus making obsolete the dentist database and educational videos on performing lap exams, applying fluoride varnish and oral health care tips for parents and pediatricians.

I was disappointed with this action, because I believe POL is one of the best dental programs out there to bring infants and toddlers into our dental practices—to establish a dental home, give us an opportunity to educate parents, and screen young children before the emergence of significant dental decay. However, with the generous support and encouragement of the Missouri Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, the website address has been purchased and POL now can continue to create a dental referral network so that pediatricians, family practitioners and OB/GYNs can improve the oral health of their patients.

Here's how the program works:

## FOR DENTISTS ALREADY SEEING KIDS WHO ARE AGE 1

Pediatric and general dentists who currently see 1-year-old children for lap exams can sign up to be a POL provider at [pointsoflightonline.org](http://pointsoflightonline.org). Once your information is entered into the website database, you will be listed as a "Point of Light" provider in your community, according to your office zip code. You will be able to check off the categories of patients you are willing to see: Infants, Medicaid patients, Children with special health care needs and/or Pregnant women. When a parent searches the website, your name will show only when the categories you provided are selected by the searcher.

Also, once registered, you will receive a package of pamphlets and posters promoting the Age 1 Dental Visit, which you will then distrib-



connecting children with dentists

ute to physicians in your area. The physician (family, pediatrician or OB/GYN) in turn will give a brochure to the parent so they can go to the website and enter their zip code in order to find a nearby dental provider. As a POL provider, you can start off small—you may need to share POL information with only one or two medical offices to keep your office busy with new, young patients.

Don't worry about having to treat decay you may find. There are pediatric dentists on the list, too, and they will be a resource for you to refer kids in need of further treatment. This collaborative effort between pediatric dentists, general dentists and our colleagues in medicine will provide dental homes for babies in order to prevent the onset of dental caries by seeing them at an early age. Put yourself in the spotlight and become a POL provider.

## FOR DENTISTS NOT SEEING KIDS UNTIL AT LEAST AGE 3

Are you operatories as busy as you'd like them to be? Would you like to open your practice to a population of patients you're not currently seeing? Everyone has the skills to look in a baby's mouth and identify the risks for developing cavities. You may feel uncomfortable at first and it may be noisy, but we all know how to "count teeth." An infant seen in your practice for his or her first visit can be literally a patient for life—and bring with them other family members not seeking dental care elsewhere. You can start seeing the kids and counseling the parents on feeding and brushing habits before problems occur, so they won't have dental restorative needs—and the associated expenses—later.

It's time to start thinking about prevention instead of waiting for cavities to occur. Problems detected early will be easier and less costly to treat. An infant exam in your office won't take more than 10 or 15 minutes of your office time. Most of the time could be spent by your assistant or hygienist interviewing the parent about the child's oral health habits at home, and the last five minutes of the appointment is spent with the dentist looking in the infant's mouth and explaining the findings to the parent.

If you would like to develop an infant oral health program for your office, you can go to the Professional Resource page on the POL website [pointsoflightonline.org](http://pointsoflightonline.org). Under educational videos you will find short clips on the knee-to-knee lap exam, infant oral hygiene, what to look for in an infant screening and more. If you would like a parent questionnaire to determine the child's risk for developing dental disease in the future, just email me at [craighdds@msn.com](mailto:craighdds@msn.com). I'll be happy to send it to you and explain how it works.

#### FOR DENTISTS WHO DON'T WANT TO SEE KIDS IN THEIR PRACTICE ... EVER

I get it! You feel more comfortable with adults. The POL project has a place for you as well. If you're willing to provide dental care to pregnant moms and help them maintain good oral health through the course of their pregnancy, you too can become a POL provider. Once you register, you will receive pamphlets and posters geared to pregnant moms that you can provide to nearby OB/GYN offices. There are many misconceptions about seeing a dentist while pregnant, and these brochures will help to dispel those myths.

#### GENERAL DENTISTS ARE THE BACKBONE

There are 114 counties in Missouri, but fewer than 80 pediatric dentists in the entire state. General dentists are needed to see very young patients to determine which ones are most at risk for dental disease and to implement caries prevention measures to help avoid the need for specialty intervention. Whether you already are seeing kids at age one or have never done so in the past but would consider adding these new patients to your practice, sign up now at the POL website. We all need to work together to change the mindset of individuals so that prevention becomes the goal.

You can become a beacon of hope for kids who are not seeing the dentist until they already have dental decay—and the associated pain, fear, shame and costs. It is my hope that you will elect to participate in the growing movement to provide a dental home to our youngest and most vulnerable patients. 🌱



Dr. Craig Hollander is a pediatric dentist in St. Louis. He is a founding member of the Missouri Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and the Point of Light liaison for Missouri. Contact him at [craighdds@msn.com](mailto:craighdds@msn.com). Learn more and sign up at [pointsoflightonline.org](http://pointsoflightonline.org).

# DVH Plan

The MDIS **Dental Vision Hearing** (DVH) Plan needs to drastically increase the number of dentists on its Preferred Provider panel before the end of 2020. *Forget almost everything you know about dental insurance.* Go online to learn more and see how easy it is to sign up and be part of.



[mdis4dds.com/dvh-provider-information](http://mdis4dds.com/dvh-provider-information)

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