

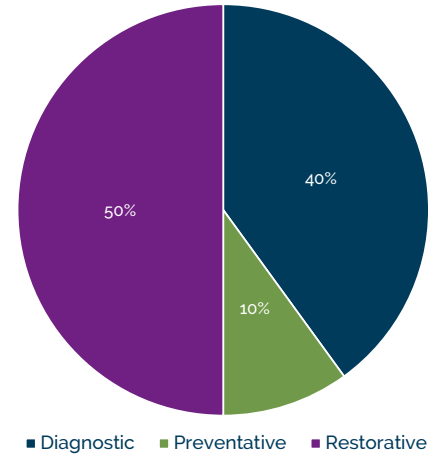


Clinic Characteristics:

Southside Community Clinic is an FQHC with 14 treatment operatories, 6 dentists, 6 dental hygienists, and 5 dental therapists including one who serves as the Dental Clinic Director.

Dental therapists contribute to productivity by increasing versatility, efficiency, and the ability for all to practice at the top of their scope. This improves scheduling, treatment completion rates, and reduces the number of visits needed. Providers (including dental therapists) have a treatment column and an exam column, with an expectation to see 2 patients each hour. If a dentist is out, the dental therapist does more restorative and diagnostic. If a hygienist is out, the dental therapist does more preventive. Providers prefer to have separate days focused on preventive, pediatrics, and periodontal procedures because it is hard to shift gears between the types of procedures. SouthSide is typically completing treatment within a 3-4 month period. Patient satisfaction, provider satisfaction, and patient utilization are all high.

**Estimate of
Dental Therapist Services**



Dental Therapists' roles:

Dental therapists primarily see pediatric and special needs patients, sometimes using nitrous oxide. The dual-licensed dental hygienist/dental therapists may provide periodontal care, but often refer these cases to the dental hygienists to keep everyone working to the top of their scope. Before dental therapists were incorporated, all pediatric patients were referred; now, they rarely refer children (only if sedation is needed). Dental Therapists use minimally invasive and behavior management techniques and receive pediatric referrals from private practices. Dentists now have days dedicated to emergency same-day appointments with more focus on oral surgery.

Recommendations for Michigan:

Integration of dental therapists takes time. Team investment, creating a safe space, and ownership in the dental therapist' success should be emphasized. Communication, collaboration, mentorship, and relational leadership are key. Openly discuss cases, provide feedback, and ask questions.

Create efficiencies by understanding the scope and strengths of each team member and utilizing them in ways that make sense. Be versatile and flexible- if something isn't working, change it. Have open conversations about how the dental therapist would handle various cases, both so they understand how and when to refer and so their supervising dentist understands where they are in their skillset. Ensure staff understand the dental therapist's Minimally Invasive Care approach- it may look different from what they learned but it's a valid, evidence-based approach supported by the ADA.

Success requires that leadership make the "why" of adding dental therapists very clear. Then, they must allow time and authority for the team to come up with the "how" of scheduling and be most productive.