

# Reconnecting the Mouth to Medical Education

Bud Conklin, DDS, Mariah Rudd, BS, Cynda Johnson, MD, MBA, Bruce Johnson, MD, Ryan Mutcherson, MEd, PhD, Lynne Pearo, RN, and Richard C. Vari, PhD



## Background

- The de-emphasis of oral health's importance to general is evident in the lack of medical schools with integrated oral health topics in their medical education curricula.
- The opportunity for early detection of oral health issues including oral cancer creates opportunities within the medical profession.
- The absence of oral health education in medical education has resulted in physicians who are poorly equipped to diagnosis, treat, refer and collaborate on matters of oral health and disease.
- This poster describes the successful integration of an oral health curriculum, with measurable outcomes, into the medical curriculum.
- In the first two years of the VTC curriculum, all medical students are now required to engage in thirty-six hours of oral health education.
  - This includes:
    - Lecture presented by an international expert on oral health
    - Labs on anatomy/oral health
    - Workshops focused on interprofessional collaboration and patient focused care
    - PBL patients with dental diseases
    - Lectures on oral manifestations of systemic disease and common oral pathologies
    - Oral cancer screening
    - Inclusion of the oral exam into the HEENT exam
- In year 3, students are required to complete an oral health rotation as part of Family Medicine Clerkship.

## Methods

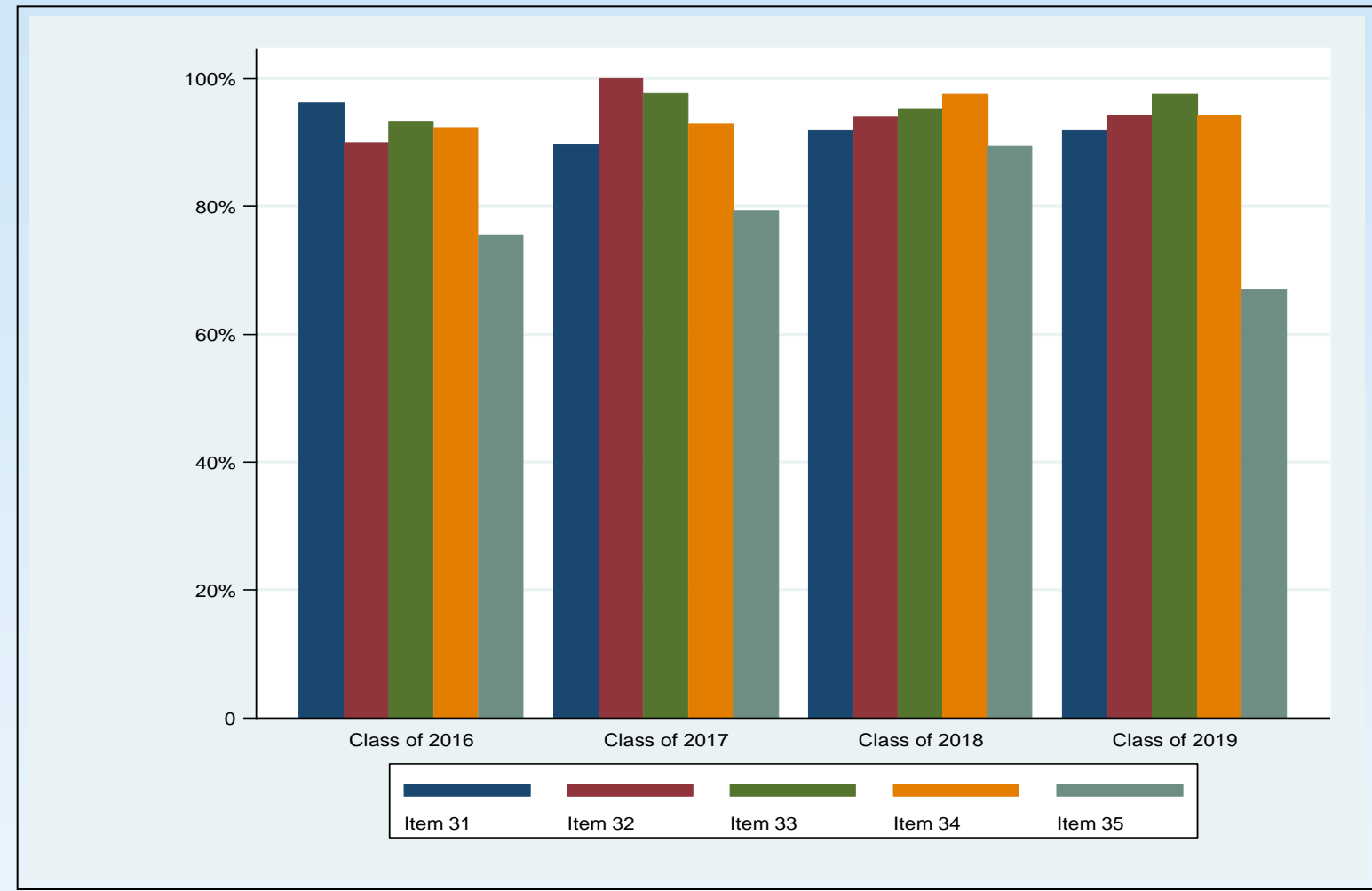
- Assessments of the oral health curriculum include:
  - HEENOT (O=oral) exam with standardized patients
  - Written exam in year 2- Block VIII Integrated Case-Based Exam (ICE)
  - Student satisfaction of the oral health week
  - Retrospective chart review comparing documentation of oral components within student (n=100) and attending (n=100) HEENT exams
    - Attending specialties included Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Cardiology, and Hospital Medicine.
    - Records were excluded from review only if the H&P was not present in the chart.

### Block VIII ICE Oral Health Case Questions

- **Item 31:** What are the (3) major areas to be addressed in the oral exam section of the HEENT exam?
- **Item 32:** From the oral exam on Ms. Johnson, describe at least two clinical findings in each major area (dentition, periodontal tissues, soft tissue/oral cancer) of the oral exam.
- **Item 33:** Provide at least two (2) differential diagnoses for each lesion (white and pigmented) and for each differential diagnosis describe how you would make a definitive diagnosis based on clinical or laboratory exam
- **Item 34:** Describe (3) medical problems that may develop from her poor oral health.
- **Item 35:** Based on Ms. Johnson's medical history, physical exam and laboratory findings, what are your specific medical management recommendations for the following.

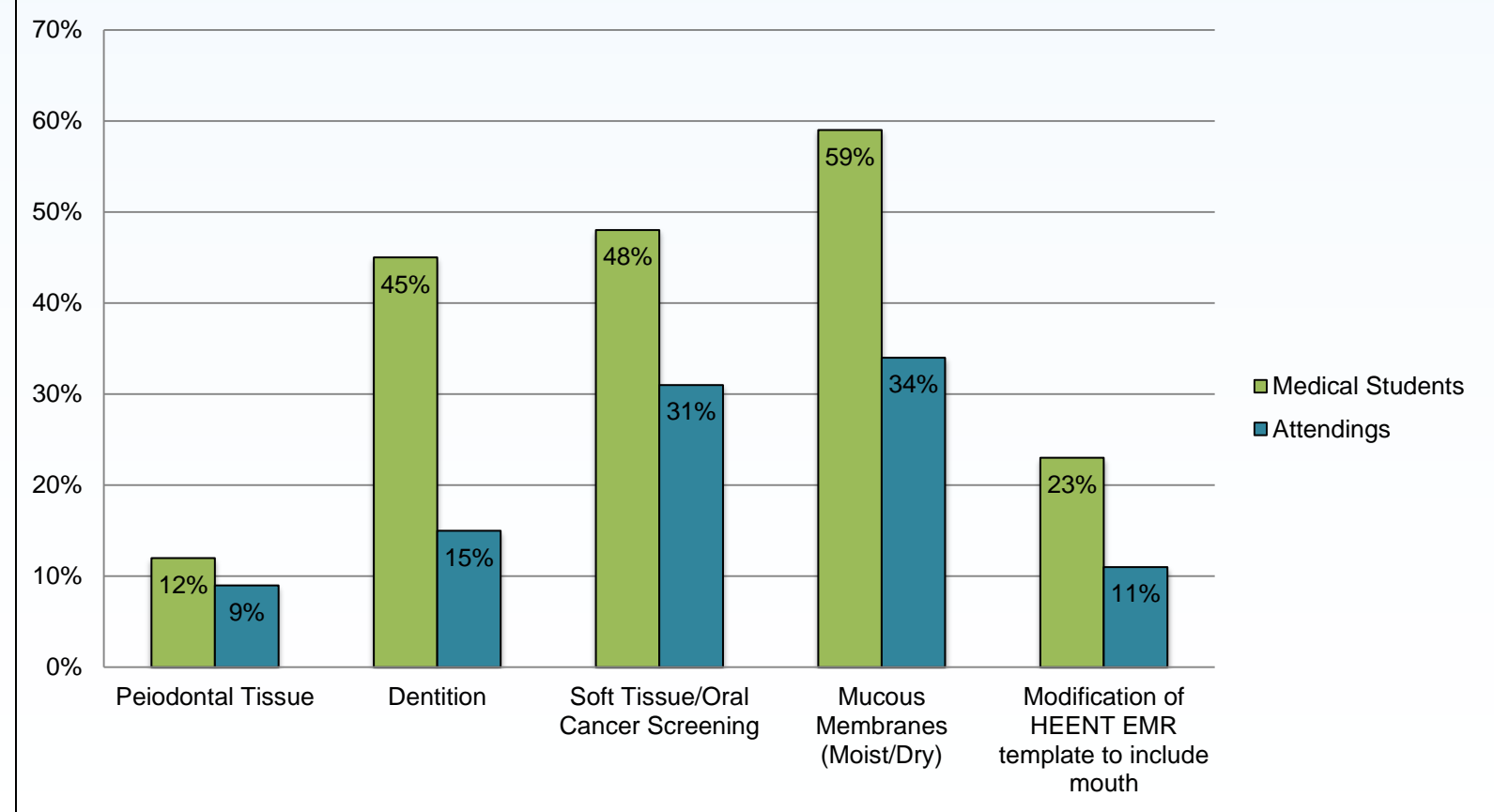
## Results

Student performance on the oral health questions on the Block VIII Integrated Case Exam (ICE)



- Qualitative findings from dental week evaluations are extremely positive.
  - One student evaluation stated “I now understand why oral health is so important and why doing an oral exam should be part of the HEENT exam.”
- The retrospective chart review revealed that students are more likely to include the documentation of periodontal tissue, dentition, oral cancer screening, and mucous membranes within their HEENT examinations.

Comparison of Medical Students and Attendings Inclusion of Oral Health Components in HEENT Exams



### Retrospective Chart Review

We found general consistency in the language and specific notations in the notes for those who included “oral” in their H&P. However, notes written by students tended to contain more oral health components.

**Attending (Cardiology)**  
 “Lips, mucosa, and tongue moist and without lesion.”

**Medical Student**  
 “Oral cavity and pharynx normal. No inflammation, swelling, exudate, or lesions. Teeth and gingiva in good general condition.”

## Summary

- Excellent student performance on oral health questions on Block VIII ICE.
- Higher rates of inclusion of oral health components by students on HEENT compared to attendings.
- High student satisfaction with oral health curriculum.

## Conclusions

- In a partnership with Delta Dental, who provided financial resources for the curriculum, VTCSOM has completed 5 years of educating and training future physicians on the importance of oral health.
- Student learning outcomes regarding oral health principles and satisfaction with the curriculum are excellent.