

January, 2025



National Rural  
Health Association



# RURAL ORAL HEALTH SEMINAR TOOLKIT

National Rural Oral Health Initiative

[www.ruralhealth.us](http://www.ruralhealth.us)

# Foreword

The National Rural Oral Health Initiative, a program of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), is pleased to release the Rural Oral Health Seminar Toolkit, created in collaboration with the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

The importance of the rural oral health workforce cannot be overstated: to deliver quality and accessible oral health services to the 46 million Americans who call rural places home. Oral health is a key component of overall well-being and a factor affecting quality of life.

Research shows that dental students are more likely to practice in a rural area after graduation if they are originally from a rural community or have practiced in a rural community during their rotations. A priority of the National Rural Oral Health Initiative is to bolster the rural oral health workforce, and the purpose of this toolkit is to introduce dental students to the benefits of living and working in a rural area after graduation.

This toolkit serves as a comprehensive resource for dental schools, students, and community leaders. Within the toolkit are resources and best practices for creating a successful rural oral health seminar.





# Why host a rural oral health seminar?

There is a national shortage of dentists practicing in rural America. A recent CareQuest Institute for Oral Health report found that 67 percent of rural areas are dental health professional shortage areas. Additionally, one-third of rural residents (34 percent) do not have dental insurance coverage, compared to 29 percent of urban and 24 percent of suburban residents.

Studies show that dental students with rural experience have a higher probability of practicing in rural areas than those without rural exposure. Rural experience can include a dental student being from a rural community or practicing in rural America for a residency or rotation experience.

The goal for a rural oral health seminar is to showcase benefits of practicing in a rural community, bolster the rural oral health workforce, and ultimately improve access to quality oral health services for rural Americans.

This section of the toolkit includes comments NRHA received while hosting rural oral health seminars at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry, University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine, and University of Nevada Las Vegas School of Dental Medicine.



# Why host a rural oral health seminar?

Based on pre- and post-tests administered during the rural oral health seminars in Virginia, Colorado, and Nevada, 63 percent of students considered practicing in rural areas, 28 percent indicated it was a possibility, and 9 percent stated no interest in practicing in rural.

After the rural oral health seminar, the students interested in rural practice increased to 82 percent, with 18 percent of students saying no or maybe.

Students were most interested in learning more about loan repayment programs, rural oral health opportunities, mentorship programs, and rural shadowing opportunities.



# Why host a rural oral health seminar?

Students who remained unchanged in their lack of interest in rural practice cited concerns about work-life balance, the perception of living in a rural community, and family as barriers. Below are quotes taken from the post-test survey.

**“I like the idea of living in a smaller community. But my wife wants a Costco and an airport nearby.”**

**“I don't know much about living in a rural area and have always lived in a city of at least 200,000 people.”**

**“I am not too sure how practicing in a rural area will affect my work-life balance. Will I have a ton of patients or just enough? Will I make a good income so I can pay my loans?”**

# Pre- and Post-Test Examples

To track success of the program, the NRHA developed and conducted pre- and post-tests using Google forms administered by each university communications department.

## Rural Oral Health Seminar Pre-Questions

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you from a rural community?:

- Yes
- No

Are you considering practicing in a rural community?:

- Yes
- No

What factors are driving you to practice in a rural community? Of if you aren't thinking about practicing in a rural community what barriers are causing you to hesitate? \_\_\_\_\_

What questions do you have for our panel about rural oral health/practicing oral healthcare in rural communities? \_\_\_\_\_

Please select any item you would like more information about. (Select all that apply):

- Rural oral health opportunities
- Internship or rotation in a rural community
- Loan repayment programs
- Mentorship programs
- Rural shadowing opportunities
- National Rural Health Association
- CareQuest Institute for Oral Health
- OPEN Network
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



# Pre- and Post-Test Examples

## Rural Oral Health Seminar Post-Questions

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Email (used to connect with student after graduation): \_\_\_\_\_

Has today's presentation encouraged you to practice in a rural community, post graduation?

- Yes
- No

If NRHA were to sponsor a site visit, would you be interested in attending?

- Yes
- No

Please provide feedback on the speaker from the National Rural Health Association. Please provide feedback on the Speaker. \_\_\_\_\_

Please select any item you would like more information about. (Select all that apply):

- **Rural oral health opportunities**
- **Internship or rotation in a rural community**
- **Loan repayment programs**
- **Mentorship programs**
- **Rural shadowing opportunities**
- **National Rural Health Association**
- **CareQuest Institute for Oral Health**
- **OPEN Network**

Would you want to know more about NRHA Membership, Student Rates, Conferences, and Speaking Opportunities?

- Yes
- No

# Rural oral health seminar: Run of show example

**Noon – 12:10 pm: Welcome and overview of the status of rural oral health in the nation**

**12:10- 12:20 pm: University staff - Welcome and opening discussion**

- Point 1: Welcome rural oral health seminar participants
- Point 2: Introduction of NRHA and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health
  - Discover the array of opportunities available to dentists who want to focus on the needs of patients living in rural communities. Dentists serving the rural population have the opportunity to:
    - Serve as a catalyst of economic growth, change, and development in a community;
    - See a wider variety of cases and learn about the oral health conditions that are common in some rural communities;
    - Potentially care for patients who have difficulty accessing oral health care, which will give the dentist a great sense of purpose and meaning;
    - Emphasize the importance of providing oral health care to rural communities and engage rural community members;
    - Recognize the importance of building strong community partnerships while cultivating interest in the rural dentistry workforce;
    - Receive firsthand knowledge of the importance of the oral health workforce and practicing in a rural community.
  - Share the impacts a rural dentist can have on the community, including the following opportunities:
    - Be a community leader and employer;
    - Family-oriented programs;
    - Less practice saturation/ less competition;
    - Ability to develop or grow a loyal patient base;
    - Comprehensive training on emergent procedures;
    - Helping bring care to people.



# Rural oral health seminar: Run of show example

Introduce rural practitioner

## **12:20– 12:35 pm: Rural practitioner presentation**

The rural practitioner will share their story of rural practice including why they chose rural practice, benefits they see in practicing in rural areas over other types of practices, and anything else they feel attendees should know, both dental students and hygienists.

*[Prompt for the rural practitioner: Outline things they learned as a dental student that helped them become a successful rural oral health practitioner and share resources or address questions they wish someone had provided or answered for them as they prepared to be a rural dentist.]*

## **12:35 pm – 12:50 pm: Q&A**

Facilitated by dental school representative, during the Q&A questions will be answered by the rural practitioner and any additional subject matter experts the dental school believes to be important. *NRHA has had success creating a panel with the rural practitioner and subject matter experts from the dental school.*

## **12:50 pm – 12:55 pm: Closing remarks**

Thank the students, rural practitioner, dean of the dental school, NRHA, and the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

# Rural oral health seminar best practices

We highly recommend considering these best practices during the planning of your rural oral health seminar:

- **Rural oral health practitioner:** If possible, try to have a rural oral health practitioner in person at the seminar. If this is not an option and the practitioner needs to attend virtually, ensure they have a view of the students.
- **Catering:** This event is intended to give students a casual learning environment over their lunch hour to connect with faculty and a rural oral health practitioner. When planning the catering of this event, give an early registration deadline to give an accurate count of students.
- **Pre- and post-tests:** Disseminate the pre-tests early with frequent reminders. After the event, send multiple reminder emails with the link to the form.
- **Timing of the event:** Consider the timeframe that the university plans to host the event. Steer clear of stressful exam times or semesters during the accreditation process.
- **Technology considerations:** If the rural practitioner is unable to present in person due to logistical constraints, consider a hybrid option for the meeting, using a room within the university with capabilities to support the technology. If possible, try to show as much of the audience as possible during the meeting.

If the dental school has any questions or concerns while planning the rural oral health seminar, direct any questions to Laura Hudson, [LHudson@ruralhealth.us](mailto:LHudson@ruralhealth.us); Piper Martin, [PMartin@ruralhealth.us](mailto:PMartin@ruralhealth.us); or Zil Joyce Dixon Romero, [ZJDRomero@ruralhealth.us](mailto:ZJDRomero@ruralhealth.us).

The NRHA team can provide branded slides, and acknowledgment of NRHA and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health is much appreciated.