

PANDA Helps Dental Providers Identify Abuse and Neglect

Approximately three million children in the United States are reported as abused or neglected every year, and about one million of those reports are substantiated. The national statistics also show that anywhere from two-thirds to 75 percent of the physical abuse of children involves injuries to the head, neck and mouth. Yet less than one percent of all reports of child maltreatment are made by dental professionals.

PANDA is trying to do something about that.

PANDA is the acronym for Prevent Abuse and Neglect through Dental Awareness. It's a public-private partnership that is helping dental providers in complying with their role as a reporter for suspected child abuse. Since its inception in 1992 in the state of Missouri, the effort has been replicated in 44 states and six international programs.

In Colorado, PANDA is now being sponsored and directed by Oral Health Awareness Colorado! (OHAC!), a statewide coalition whose mission is to develop and promote strategies to achieve optimal oral health for all Coloradans. Other members of the Colorado PANDA partnership include the University of Colorado School of Dentistry, the Colorado Dental Association, Metropolitan Denver Dental Society, Colorado Department of Health and Environment, Colorado Community Health Network, Colorado Dental Hygienists Association, Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Springs Dental Society and the C. Henry Kempe National Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect. "Knowing how, what and when to report child abuse and neglect may make a life or death difference for a child," said Theresa Anselmo, Chairwoman of OHAC!

Dentists and dental hygienists in Colorado are required by state law to report suspected abuse. To assist dental professionals to perform their duty as state-mandated reporters and to help to prevent abuse and neglect through dental awareness, the PANDA coalition in Colorado has four key objectives:

- Educate dental providers to recognize signs of abuse and neglect by conducting seminars and providing resource materials.
- Provide dental professionals with information and procedures for reporting child abuse and neglect.
- Promote awareness of child abuse detection within the dental community.
- Provide dental professionals with referral resources for families to help prevent abuse and neglect.
- PANDA Colorado recently conducted a day-long educational seminar for dental providers attending the annual Rocky Mountain Dental Convention in Denver. The program featured a talk by John McDowell, DDS, director of Oral Medicine and Forensic Sciences at the CU School of Dentistry, on domestic violence with special emphasis on child abuse, and a report on program in addressing child maltreatment by Donald Bross, PhD, professor of pediatrics at the CU School of Medicine.

For more information on the PANDA program, please contact OHAC! at 303-692-2569.