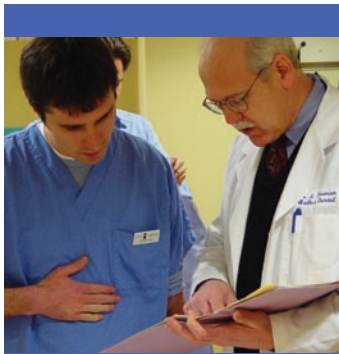


Featured Faculty Profile: Steve Shuman

Examining the Oral Health Needs of Older Adults



Each issue of *Old News* will focus on a member of the Center on Aging faculty and his/her particular area of expertise. This month, we feature **Steve Shuman, D.D.S., M.S.**

Shuman is a Center on Aging faculty member, as well as an Associate Professor and Director for the Oral Health Services for Older Adults Program in the School of Dentistry at the University of Minnesota.

Shuman received his D.D.S. from Temple University in 1982, and later received an M.S. in Geriatric Dentistry from the University of Minnesota in 1989. He also completed MAGEC's Faculty Fellowship Program in 1990.

You could say **Steve Shuman has the ultimate dental appointment!** In his role as educator, Shuman conducts coursework for U of M dental, dental hygiene and graduate students on special needs populations, which includes an interdisciplinary geriatric rotation at Walker Methodist Health Center. He also provides a geriatric dental mini-residency program – the first of its kind in the U.S. – that gives practicing dental professionals an intensive continuing education opportunity in long-term care dentistry.

He is also active in research efforts to examine dental care access for seniors, including this summer's statewide survey* of long-term care facilities, in collaboration with the Minnesota Dental Association (MDA) and other statewide aging services providers. Shuman also chairs the MDA's Elderly and Special Needs Adults Committee and recently worked with the Minnesota Department of Health to develop new educational materials on oral health for long-term care providers around the state.

"The goal is to connect dental professionals with the long-term care community, in an effort to improve access to dental services for older adults," Shuman said.

Understanding Geriatric Dental Issues

While the elderly have similar dental issues to many adults, there are some specific concerns more frequently associated with an aging population. These include root decay, tooth loss, normal wear and tear of teeth and existing dental work, receding gums and problems with dentures and supporting soft tissues.

Moreover, older adults may have multiple chronic diseases that affect oral health. They may be on multiple medications, resulting in dry mouth (which increases the risk of oral disease). Their living situation or possible disability may diminish the quality or regularity of their daily hygiene routine. Furthermore, patients who are physically frail or have cognitive impairment may have difficulty understanding their dental care needs or cooperating for daily oral care.

Lack of transportation or financial resources may further limit their access to professional care. "Long-term care facilities may not be able to find dental services for residents," said Shuman. "The geriatric population is more challenging to treat for many reasons."

Shuman goes on to describe the intricacies of the oral health systemic relationship. "Aside from concerns about poor oral health leading to nutritional issues, patients with diabetes are at higher risk of gum disease, and in turn, gum disease can interfere with blood sugar control," Shuman said. "Same goes for plaque and debris in the mouth, which place individuals with swallowing problems at higher risk for infections in the lungs. There is also mounting evidence of an association between poor oral health and some cardiovascular diseases."

Any one of these geriatric dental issues is cause for concern, but together they raise serious public health implications about quality and accessible dental care.

"Geriatric dental access is lagging behind the need for geriatric dental care," said Shuman. "Unfortunately, oral health care is often considered a lower priority than other concerns."

Improving Dental Care Access

To address these issues, Shuman oversees two key programs: the School of Dentistry's Oral Health Services for Older Adults Program (OHSOA), and Walker Methodist's Dental Clinic for seniors.

OHSOA is a nationally recognized program, established nearly 30 years ago to provide geriatric education for dental students and other health professionals. Its overarching goal is to improve community access to high quality dental care for older adults.

In addition to its educational programming, OHSOA conducts research projects and delivers community outreach services – all supported by grants from National Institutes of Health (NIH),

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the U.S. Bureau of Health Professions, private foundations, and local and state government agencies.

Originally, community-based outreach was provided as part of the Wilder Senior Dental Program in St. Paul. That program was later replicated in Minneapolis, in partnership with Walker Methodist, and now serves older adults in nursing homes, assisted living centers, adult day care and the community, including many patients with dementia and other complex geriatric medical conditions.

"We see folks with an array of oral health issues, often related to declining overall health or difficulties with daily oral hygiene," said Shuman. "Caregivers typically identify concerns with patient appearance, smell, eating or other obvious symptoms, though sometimes not until the problem has reached a more urgent (and costlier) level of care."

Fortunately, the clinic has geriatric dental experts, access to an inter-professional health care team (from the University's Academic Health Center), and special equipment like mechanical lifts that make it possible to serve elderly or disabled

patients who may otherwise not be able to be served by a standard dental practice.

In short, this community-based approach to education and service, with a high level of geriatric specialization, helps to bridge the gap in dental access for older adults.

For more information about the Oral Health Services for Older Adults Program, visit www.dentistry.umn.edu/programs_admissions/advanced_programs/grad_geriatrics/home.html. To learn more about Walker Methodist Dental Clinic, visit www.walkermeth.org/dental.html.

***ATTENTION LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** Please complete and return the dental care survey you received from the U of M. We appreciate your prompt response.

CoA Names Fesler-Lampert Chair in Aging Studies for 2010-11

Hee Yun Lee focuses her research on quality of life for elderly immigrants

The Center on Aging has named its Fesler-Lampert Chair in Aging Studies for 2010-11. This year's honoree is **Hee Yun Lee, Ph.D.**, who succeeds Walter C. Low, Ph.D., Fesler-Lampert Chair, 2009-10.

Dr. Lee is an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work, where she conducts research on efforts to improve quality of life, increase health literacy and reduce cancer care disparities among elderly Asian American immigrants and other elderly populations.

The endowed chair funds researchers who wish to advance knowledge and understanding about the aging process. Dr. Lee plans to pursue a community-based participatory research project to examine health literacy – specifically cancer literacy and pertinent screening behaviors – among elders in the Hmong community in the Twin Cities area.

"The long-term goal of the project is to create effective, culturally competent and community-based interventions that increase cancer screening," she said.

Dr. Lee has been studying aging for more than 20 years. She received her Master's in Social Work (M.S.W) and her doctorate from the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as a Master's degree in Gerontology from the University of Southern California. Lee is from Seoul, Korea where she attended Seoul National University.

On a related note, Dr. Lee will teach an online course, entitled Health Literacy and Cultural Competency in Older Adults. For more information, go to <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/ContinuingEd/Default.asp>.



Hee Yun Lee, Ph.D.

The Fesler-Lampert Chair in Aging Studies enables University of Minnesota faculty to pursue research and study in aging, by funding up to a year's release time and providing other support. Established in 1999, it is presented by the CoA, with support from the U of M Graduate School and the generosity of David and Elizabeth Fesler.