

Changing Demographics and Providing Dental Services for Hispanic Children

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General population demographics in the United States are undergoing dramatic changes. Long term customary populations which provided the bulwark for many successful dental practices are being replaced by the many minority populations, in particular the Hispanic population. Despite these significant general population developments, the demographic profile of the dental profession has experienced (and apparently – based on dental student populations – will continue to experience) limited changes. The economic strength of the profession may well be predicated upon its responses to these developments.

Keywords: Hispanic, U.S. children, dental services, disability.

“New census estimates foretell profound demographic change for the country.”¹

INTRODUCTION

The majority of births in the United States is now by Hispanic, black and Asian mothers. It is evident that nationwide, white Americans will become a minority within about three decades and will “...be reliant on younger minorities and immigrants for our future demographic and economic growth.”²

Decades of studies and reports based on race/ethnicity, income, residency locations and insurance have emphasized the disparities in the delivery of dental care to the general public. For example, half of youngsters and teenagers (ages 5-17 years) were reported to have had no expenditures for dental services in 2010, followed by two-thirds of younger adults (18-44 years) and more than half of the population 45 years and older with no spending for dental care.³

The lay-out of most tables in these reports accentuates the use of services by non-Hispanic white middle and higher income populations with insurance. The tables usually compare and recognize the inadequacies for the poor and minority populations.

“More than 4 million children aged 17 and younger had unmet dental need in 2011 because their families could not afford dental care....”⁴

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Out-of-pocket spending represents 44 percent of all dental service costs. By contrast, out-of-pocket spending represented 14 percent for all health care expenditures for the total population (including 17 percent of the costs for youngsters < 18 years; 15 percent for the 18-64 year population and 12 percent for the 65+ year population).⁵ In essence, spending for dental services “is felt” to a greater extent than for total health services.

The reality is that general population demographics are undergoing dramatic changes with the result that the long term customary populations which provided the bulwark for many successful dental practices are being replaced by the many minority populations.⁶ Despite these dramatic general population developments, the demographic profile of the dental profession has experienced (and apparently – based on dental student populations – will continue to experience) limited changes. Compared to the general population, Asian students are over-represented among dental school graduates and other minorities continue to be under-represented among dental school graduates during the past decade.⁷

Hispanics: an increasing and evolving population

“More than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population.”⁸

Hispanics are a diverse ethnic population, varying in race, origin, age, immigration status, and other characteristics. According to the 2010 Census, 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of which 50.5 million (or 16 percent) were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The Hispanic population increased from 35.3 million in 2000 when this population group made up 13 percent of the total population. The Census Bureau projects that by the next census in 2020, almost one-in-five residents of the country (63.8 million individuals) will be of Hispanic origin. Many Hispanics continue to face disparities in health coverage and care, and they have the highest uninsured rate among racial/ethnic groups, with nearly one in three lacking coverage.¹⁰

Table 1. National and Hispanic population in the 2010 Census and projections (in millions): 2010 - 2060^{8,9}

	Census		Projections		
	2010	2015	2020	2025	2060
Total U.S. population	308.7	321.4	335.9	346.4	420.3
Hispanic population	50.5	57.1	63.8	70.9	128.8
Percent Hispanic population	16.3%	17.6%	19.1%	20.5%	30.6%

Some specifics

Over half of the Hispanic population in the United States resided in just three states: California, Texas, and Florida. In 2010, 37.6 million (or 75 percent) of Hispanics lived in the eight states with Hispanic populations of one million or more (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey, and Colorado). Hispanics in California accounted for 14.0 million (28 percent) of the total Hispanic population, while the Hispanic population in Texas accounted for 9.5 million (19 percent).⁸

- While data are not available on the percent of Hispanics who are undocumented immigrants, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that overall, more than two-thirds of all immigrants are lawful immigrants or naturalized citizens, while less than a third are undocumented immigrants.¹⁰
- Nearly three-quarters of Hispanic families have at least one full-time worker, but are more likely than non-Hispanic workers to be in low-wage jobs. More than half (53 percent) of nonelderly Hispanics are employed in agriculture, service, or construction industries. About one in three Hispanics have family income below the poverty level, compared to one in seven non-Hispanic whites.
- Hispanics tend to be employed in industries and jobs which frequently do not offer employer sponsored insurance, and when it is offered, they often cannot afford it given their low income.¹¹
- Medicaid covers over half of Hispanic children, but plays a much more limited role for Hispanic adults, leaving more than four in ten uninsured. These coverage patterns reflect the fact that states have significantly expanded children’s eligibility for Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), while Medicaid eligibility for adults remains very limited in most states.¹¹
- Medicaid plays an important role in filling gaps in health coverage for most Hispanic children, but many Hispanic children and adults remain uninsured. Medicaid is a key source of coverage for 13.7 million Hispanics, many of whom would otherwise go uninsured due to their limited access to private coverage and low incomes. The reality is that many Hispanics, especially adults, who have limited eligibility for Medicaid, remain uninsured. In addition, reflecting on historic enrollment barriers, eligible Hispanics

are less likely to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP compared to non-Hispanic whites and blacks.¹²

- The recently passed Affordable Care Act “...has the potential to increase health coverage and access to care for low-income uninsured Hispanics, and as states decide whether to expand Medicaid, the stakes are especially high in states with a large number of uninsured Hispanics.”¹²

Language

The language of news media consumption is changing for Hispanics. Growing share of Latino adults are consuming news in English from television, print, radio and internet outlets, and a declining share are doing so in Spanish. These changes reflect several ongoing demographic trends within the Hispanic community—slowing immigration, a growing number of U.S. born Latinos entering adulthood and growth in the number of English speaking Latino adults.¹³ Two-thirds of Mexican-origin Hispanics ages 5 and older speak English proficiently. About nine-in-ten (89 percent) native-born Mexicans ages 5 and older speak English proficiently. This compares to about one-in-three (29 percent) among Mexican immigrants.¹⁴

Mexican-origin Hispanics

In 2010, people of Mexican origin comprised the largest Hispanic group, representing 63 percent of the total Hispanic population in the United States. This estimate includes 11.4 million immigrants born in Mexico and 22.3 million born in the U.S. Among Mexican immigrants, half (51 percent) are in the U.S. illegally while about a third are legal permanent residents (32 percent) and 16 percent are naturalized U.S. citizens. Overall, naturalization rates among Mexican immigrants who are in the country legally are just half that of legal immigrants from all other countries combined.¹⁵

The second largest group was Puerto Rican, which comprised 9 percent of the Hispanic population in 2010. The Salvadorans and Cuban population each represented approximately 4 percent of the total Hispanic population in 2010 census. These four groups accounted for about 80 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States.

Table 2. U.S. Hispanic population (in 000s) origin profile: 2011¹⁵

Total Hispanic population – 51,927	
1. Mexicans	33,539
2. Puerto Ricans	4,916
3. Salvadorans	1,952
4. Cubans	1,889
5. Dominicans	1,528
6. Guatemalans	1,216
7. Columbians	989
8. Spaniards	707
9. Hondurans	702
10. Ecuadorians	645
11. Peruvians	556
12. Nicaraguans	395
13. Venezuelans	259
14. Argentineans	242

Note: The 14 largest Hispanic groups (based on self-described race or ethnicity)

- Mexican-origin Hispanics are younger than both the U.S. population and Hispanics overall. The median age of Mexicans is 25; the median ages of the U.S. population and all Hispanics are 37 and 27, respectively. U.S.-born Mexicans are considerably younger than their foreign-born counterparts. The median age of native-born Mexicans is 17, compared with 38 of the foreign born.¹⁴
- Mexicans have lower levels of education than the Hispanic population overall. Some 10 percent of Mexicans ages 25 and older—compared with 13 percent of all U.S. Hispanics—have obtained at least a bachelor’s degree. Mexicans born in the U.S. are almost three times more likely to have earned a bachelor’s degree than those born in Mexico—15 percent vs. 6 percent, respectively. About six-in-ten Mexican immigrants have not earned a high school diploma (59 percent), compared with 21 percent of Mexicans born in the U.S.¹⁴
- The median annual personal earnings for Hispanics of Mexican origin ages 16 and older was \$20,000 in the year prior to the 2011 survey, the same as for U.S. Hispanics overall. U.S.-born Mexicans had higher earnings than their immigrant counterparts—a median of \$22,000 vs. \$19,000 respectively.¹⁴
- The share of Mexicans who live in poverty, 27 percent, is slightly higher than the rate for Hispanics overall (25 percent). U.S.-born Mexicans are slightly less likely to live in poverty than their foreign-born counterparts—26 percent vs. 29 percent respectively.¹⁴
- One-third of Mexicans (33 percent) do not have health insurance, compared with 30 percent of all Hispanics. More than half (57 percent) of Mexican immigrants are uninsured, compared with 20 percent of those born in the U.S.

Disabilities

No review of the underserved Hispanic and other populations would be complete without reference to individuals with disabilities. Approximately 56.7 million people living in the United States in 2010 (18.7 percent of the population) had some kind of disability. About 12.6 percent or 38.3 million people had a severe disability. The overall number has continued to increase and will continue to do so much further as the expanding aging population reaches into the 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond.¹⁶ In 2010, almost 29 percent of individuals with disabilities (many of whom are dependent upon the Medicaid program for care) did not obtain dental services because of cost.¹⁷ Also, Medicaid dentists are “...so hard to find.”¹⁸

In 2011, there were an estimated 4.3 million Hispanics (8.4 percent) with severe disabilities, including 643,100 children (3.7 percent) less than eighteen years. The estimated number of Hispanic children with severe disabilities ranged as high as 132,400 in Texas and 148,200 in California. The proportion of Hispanic children less than eighteen years with severe difficulties ranged as high as 7.4 percent in Massachusetts and 7.9 percent in Pennsylvania.

Compared to non-Hispanic white children, Hispanic children with autism and other developmental disabilities experience more problems with health care.

Table 3. Estimated number (in 000s) and proportion of Hispanic children and total Hispanic residents with severe disabilities by nation and state: 2011¹⁹

	Residents with severe disabilities		
	Hispanic residents		
	Number	< 18 years	of all ages
Percent		Percent	
Alabama	2.3	3.4%	5.5%
Arizona	21.9	3.1	7.9
Arkansas	5.3	3.7	5.6
California	148.2	3.1	7.5
Colorado	16.0	4.2	9.1
Connecticut	8.7	5.4	10.2
Delaware	1.1	4.1	7.2
Florida	39.2	3.5	9.8
Georgia	8.1	2.5	4.9
Hawaii	2.2	4.7	10.5
Idaho	5.1	6.9	8.8
Illinois	21.2	2.9	5.9
Indiana	5.4	3.4	6.7
Iowa	1.8	2.9	6.4
Kansas	5.1	4.1	6.8
Kentucky	2.8	5.4	7.9
Louisiana	3.1	5.5	8.5
Maryland	4.8	3.1	5.2
Massachusetts	15.7	7.4	12.7
Michigan	8.8	5.1	9.3
Minnesota	4.7	4.5	6.6
Mississippi	1.5	8.8	5.5
Missouri	4.0	4.7	8.9
Nebraska	2.1	2.9	5.1
Nevada	0.6	2.2	6.5
New Jersey	1.3	3.9	8.8
New Mexico	3.4	12.4	10.4
New York	41.1	4.2	10.2
N. Carolina	12.2	3.8	5.6
Ohio	7.0	5.1	9.5
Oklahoma	6.2	4.5	7.4
Oregon	5.9	3.2	7.2
Pennsylvania	7.9	13.7	21.0
Rhode Island	1.5	3.3	9.4
S. Carolina	2.6	3.1	5.2
Tennessee	4.8	4.3	6.6
Texas	132.4	3.9	9.5
Utah	3.7	2.5	5.5
Virginia	5.3	2.5	4.6
Washington	14.8	4.8	7.5
Wisconsin	6.9	5.0	8.2
U.S.	643.1	3.7	8.4

Note: Census Bureau data are not available for nine states due to the limited number of Hispanic residents in the particular state.

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- Hispanic children were more likely than non-Hispanic white children to lack a usual source of care, a personal doctor or nurse and insurance.
- Hispanic children reported more difficulty using services, problems securing referrals and unmet health care needs than non-Hispanic white children.
- Hispanic families experienced more problems with health care providers not spending enough time with their children, lack of cultural sensitivity from providers and providers failing to make parents feel like a partner in their children's health care.²⁰

CONCLUSION

Ascendency of minority populations, in particular the Hispanic population with disabilities, provides a need to maximize effort to improve access for oral health services for these individuals. "The proverbial roles of increasing 'minority power' and 'minority practitioner role models' are essential factors in: 1) developing legislative support for the needed health services of minority populations and 2) increasing the demand for all oral health care from providers with whom minority populations could identify."⁶

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