



## News Release

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### **Diabetes and gum disease keep each other company** Group Health and Washington Dental Service launch new study

SEATTLE— People with diabetes, and their health care providers, know they're at risk of stroke, heart disease, kidney disease—and losing their sight and limbs. But they may not know they're also at risk of losing their teeth, as serious gum disease (periodontal disease, not mere gingivitis) and diabetes also tend to happen together. Periodontal disease is a gum infection that is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Usually painless, it often goes undetected.

That's why Group Health and the Washington Dental Service (WDS) are teaming up on a new study to explore the relationship between diabetes and gum disease. The study is part of an ongoing partnership to strengthen the links between medical and dental care. It builds on the WDS-Group Health pilot program to build oral health preventive-care services into routine well-child visits.

"People really care about their teeth and their smiles," said study leader Robert Reid, MD, PhD, a Group Health doctor who is an associate medical director of Group Health's Department of Preventive Care and an assistant investigator at the Group Health Center for Health Studies. "So detecting and treating periodontal disease may help motivate patients to keep their diabetes under control."

Dr. Reid knows the importance of this bridge first-hand. He has type 1 diabetes (sometimes called childhood diabetes) and has had gum disease that recently required dental implants for lost teeth.

"Diabetics have a significantly higher risk of periodontal disease than non-diabetics," noted Ron Inge, DDS, vice president and dental director for WDS. "Periodontitis may be a key contributor to complications of diabetes."

In the new one-year study, funded by a grant from WDS, researchers will examine records from people age 40–74 who belong to both Group Health and WDS. They will see whether gum disease is linked to diabetes, blood sugar levels, and other health problems and costs related to diabetes.

Group Health is an established leader in diabetes care, said Dr. Reid. “Yet even at Group Health, we doctors and nurses who care for people with diabetes may not recognize when they have periodontal disease and require treatment, because we don’t do dental care.” And dentists don’t always know which of their patients have diabetes. “The collaboration between WDS and Group Health is helping to bridge the divide between medicine and dentistry.” As an innovative leader in dental care, Washington Dental Service believes that oral health is essential to overall health.

### **Group Health Center for Health Studies**

Founded in 1947, Group Health is a Seattle-based, consumer-governed, nonprofit health care system that coordinates care and coverage. For 25 years, Group Health Center for Health Studies has conducted research on preventing, diagnosing, and treating major health problems. Government and private research grants provide its main funding.

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