

POLICY FORUM

A Note on Oral Health, and on the Future of the North Carolina Medical Journal

Introduction

Satchmo and Ol' Blue Eyes—Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra—just might have been public health professionals, knowing a thing or two about social connection: “When you’re smiling, the whole world smiles with you” is prescient social health and mental health messaging—and a call to take better care of our pearly whites. Our eyes may be a window to the soul, but our teeth and the state of our dentition and gums can be gateways to poor nutrition and major illness. Diseases of the gums and oral cavity are associated with heart disease and stroke, bronchitis and pneumonia, pre-term birth, and even dementia.

There has long been a disconnect between oral health and physical health. Nearly one in four adults has inflamed gums, dental decay, or periodontal disease—uncomfortable and often painful in their own right, but also activating pathways of inflammation that are detrimental to the heart, lungs, uterus, and brain.

This issue of the journal argues that the goal of improving health compels us to address heart, mind, body, and our teeth and gums. Public policies to improve access to dental care through more comprehensive insurance; increasing the dental workforce; and addressing geographic, ethnic and racial, and rural-urban disparities are all key to improving dental health.

With this issue, the *North Carolina Medical Journal* ceases to publish regularly in print and will appear exclusively online. The NCMJ will reach back almost 175 years to our founding in 1849 and will once again focus on peer-reviewed original research. Ronny Bell, PhD, MS, assumes the role of Editor in Chief. He has served as a co-scientific editor of the journal since 2019, and is Chair of the Division of Pharmaceutical Outcomes & Policy and the Fred Eshelman Distinguished Professor at the UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy.

As the journal makes this transition, its co-publisher the North Carolina Institute of Medicine continues its commitment to convening work groups to research, discuss, and publish on key issues of policy and practice affecting the health and well-being of all North Carolinians, and will continue to develop health policy content of relevance to the state and its policymakers and practitioners.

It has been a privilege and pleasure and a labor of love to edit the NCMJ. Thank you. NCMJ

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Editor Emeritus