

OPINION

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Quality dental care improves health

An important health care issue to be addressed during Florida's 2020 legislative session is access to dental care. For low-income Floridians, dental care is extremely limited and, for those in rural areas, access is even more challenging. Senate Bill 152, sponsored by Sen. Jeff Brandes, would create an educated and licensed mid-level dental professional, known as a dental therapist, to supplement — not replace — the work of dentists. With an increased number of dental professionals available, it would be possible to improve access to dental care throughout the state.

With a background in laboratory medicine and as a longtime health care advocate, I first became aware of the lack of quality, affordable dental care through interactions with Florida Voices for Health, a coalition of diverse community-based organizations working to improve health care outcomes.

I believe authorizing dental therapists to practice in the state could have a profound impact on the health of Floridians, especially for children and vulnerable citizens, such as the elderly and uninsured adults. For years, mid-level providers, such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants, have been successfully utilized in primary care settings and other branches of medicine. It only makes sense that dentistry, another medical field, should take the same path.

I encourage Brevard legislators to attend a local "Dental Day" so they can see firsthand the need for better access to dental care and consider supporting this beneficial legislation, which will positively impact the health of Brevard County residents.

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