A New National Initiative to Enhance Geriatric Oral Health: 
Oral Health -- An Essential Element of Healthy Aging 
SK Shuman, X Chen, PK Friedman, EM Ghezzi, MJ Saunders, B Wu 
for the Gerontological Society of America, Washington, DC

Abstract
Despite substantial evidence that good oral health is an important part of overall health and well-being, improving or maintaining oral health in the aging US population remains a significant challenge due to multiple potential access barriers. To address this challenge, the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) launched a major new initiative entitled, "Oral Health: An Essential Element of Healthy Aging" with the goal of promoting better oral health and quality of life outcomes in older adults by focusing all members of the health care team on interprofessional whole-person care that recognizes the inherent connection between oral and systemic health and is valued in the health care system. Fundamental to this effort is the conviction that health professionals of all types, not just dental professionals, can be "oral health champions" by advocating, educating stakeholders, and providing and facilitating direct care that supports better oral health.

Methods
In mid-2016, GSA began this initiative by assembling a workgroup of national geriatric oral health experts to help guide this effort in coordination with GSA's Strategic Alliances and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Program. Baseline information on key issues impacting oral health for the aging US population was first identified, summarized, and presented in a special issue of GSA's What's Hot newsletter devoted to geriatric oral health.

GSA Oral Health Workgroup
Stephen Shuman, DDS, MS - Chairperson 
University of Minnesota School of Dentistry and Graduate School
Xi Chen, DDS, PhD 
University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics
Paula K. Friedman, DDS, MSD, MPH 
Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine
Elisa M. Ghezzi, DDS, PhD 
Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor of Michigan 
School of Dentistry
Michèle J. Saunders, DMD, MS, MPH 
University of Texas Health Science Center
Beii Wu, PhD 
New York University 
Rory Meyers College of Nursing

Building on this foundation, GSA then convened a national forum of leading experts and key stakeholders committed to healthy aging to help develop an interprofessional roadmap to improve oral health in older adults using a structured consensus-building process under the guidance of a professional facilitator. At this forum, invited national experts first reviewed key trends and developments affecting the oral health of US older adults in a series of plenary presentations. Small interprofessional working group discussions were then held to consider and prioritize major research, education, practice, and policy issues and recommendations. GSA's Oral Health Workgroup members facilitated and recorded the discussions of each forum working group.

Stakeholders
AARP
Administration for Community Living
American Association for Dental Research
American Board of Dental Public Health
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Dental Hygienists' Association
American Nurses Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Public Health Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
Eldercare Workforce Alliance
Generations United
Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association

Results
The conclusions and most promising interprofessional solutions identified by each workgroup were then organized into a white paper entitled, "Interprofessional Solutions for Improving Oral Health in Older Adults: Addressing Access Barriers, Creating Oral Health Champions" released in July 2017 at the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics World Congress.

Key Interprofessional Solutions for Improving Oral Health in Older Adults: 
Addressing Access Barriers; Creating Oral Health Champions
1. Implement Oral Health Education and Experiences for All Health Professionals
2. Develop Interprofessional Practice Opportunities
3. Advocate for Medicare Oral Health Services
4. Create Oral Health Interprofessional Champions
5. Improve Oral Health in Communities of Need
6. Build a Coalition to Promote Oral Health

Each solution included a discussion on:
• Who could be involved in this solution
• The challenges and barriers that may be encountered by policy makers, educators, practitioners, researchers, and funders
• The key points of evaluation

The GSA multi-faceted initiative includes a special webpage that showcases activities that address each of these solutions by stakeholders, including publications, presentations, infographics, research and funding opportunities.

Conclusion
Tooth loss and poor oral health are not inevitable during the aging process. Oral health can be maintained throughout one’s lifetime with daily oral hygiene and periodic professional care. Prevention and patient education strategies—both for individuals and communities—are critical in oral health for older adults. Oral health is a necessary part of overall health; it affects quality of life, has a potentially positive impact on a variety of chronic systemic conditions, and may contribute to reductions in total health care costs. The six "Solutions" advocated provide a roadmap for oral health champions to use in improving oral health in older adults. Through coordinated strategies in the education, practice, policy, and research arenas, an oral health community can coalesce and drive progress toward a new paradigm in which all health professionals share responsibility for better outcomes in both oral and systemic health.

The GSA Oral Health Initiative is supported by GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare.