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Program Description

The University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine offers a service learning program which enhances clinical and psychological preparation for practice. The practice of dentistry, highly technical in nature, demands a sophisticated integration of theory, technique, and assessment skill. The Advanced Clinical Training and Service (ACTS) Program stimulates development of integration skills through fieldwork in controlled, but challenging environments while sensitizing students to health disparities and the needs of culturally diverse populations.

The ACTS Program provides students an opportunity to receive a variety of experiences in a more realistic work setting. A major feature of the ACTS Program is independent performance in situations which resemble the environment that students will encounter after graduation.

ACTS allows dental students to develop increased professional confidence and competence through additional and special clinical experiences. It provides exposure to rural and urban health care systems, particularly those which care for underserved populations. While practicing in the ACTS Program, students become familiar with a number of different community settings, urban and rural. Finally, students address health disparities by providing treatment to people in Colorado who face significant barriers to oral health care.

Upon completion of ACTS affiliations, we expect that dental students will have gained the clinical competence and confidence they will need for success in beginning practice as a graduate dentist. ACTS affiliations also provide an opportunity to have the time to examine and evaluate a functioning dental office. Some questions students may want to be thinking about during affiliations are:

- Appointment control - how are patients scheduled?
- Office policies - employee job descriptions, office policies
- Financial policies - payment plans, insurance, PPOs, etc.
- Charting systems and informed consent
- Marketing - how does the office get new patients?

Program Objectives

Objectives of the ACTS Program are to:

- provide additional clinical experience in rural and urban settings;
- provide care to underserved populations and reduce oral health disparities;
- familiarize students with a variety of practice settings; and
- enhance professional confidence and competence.
**Program Details**

The ACTS Program is part of the Department of Applied Dentistry. The following individuals are responsible for the ACTS Program –

- **Program Director/Department Chair:** Dr. Rob Berg
- **Program Manager:** Ms. Karen Tawara Jones

**Schedule of affiliations**

ACTS recognizes that each student is an individual and it provides each student an opportunity for a one-on-one educational experience. It is a community-based immersion education program. Features from the past, like “part-time ACTS” and “banked time,” have been eliminated in favor of more immersive experiences. Students now spend the final 12 months of the dental curriculum practicing in an alternating pattern of two weeks at ACTS clinics and two weeks in the school-based clinics. If the Competency Review Board (CRB) determines that a student is in good standing and making progress toward all educational goals, then she/he enters this alternating schedule in mid-May, the beginning of the summer term. An ACTS clinical affiliation consists of two or three of these two-week assignments, for a total of four to six weeks at each location. For those final 12 months of the curriculum, the student will practice at four different ACTS clinics and will remain an active member of her/his CU Dental Teams practice at the school until the end of the spring semester. As the student’s portfolio of clinical experiences grows broader and deeper, those weeks in the school’s Dental Teams practice focus on increasingly complex diagnoses and treatments.

**Local affiliations**

About half of the clinics that participate in ACTS are located in the Denver metro area. Some are federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and others are affiliated with public institutions or different types of community-based not-for-profit organizations. They are located in Arvada, Aurora, Commerce City, Denver, Lakewood, and Thornton. Organizations include Salud Family Health Centers, Metro Community Providers Network, Innovage, Inner City Health Center, Howard Dental Center, Department of Veterans Affairs, Denver Health, Dental Aid, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, and Clinica Family Health Services. Through an affiliation with Sheridan Health Services and the CU College of Nursing, students also practice in the school’s mobile dental clinic at its wintertime location in Sheridan, a southwestern suburb of Denver. Students typically spend two of their four ACTS affiliations practicing with these local partners. Their other affiliations are with more geographically distant partners.
**Distant Affiliations**

The other half of clinics that participate in ACTS are located further from the Anschutz Medical Campus. Again, some are FQHCs and some are affiliated with other organizations. In geographically underserved areas of the state, it is also possible for students to complete affiliations in private dental offices. Some of the communities where ACTS students practice are Alamosa, Center, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Fort Morgan, Frisco, Greeley, Grand Junction, Loveland, Limon, Pueblo, Rocky Ford, Steamboat Springs, Sterling, Strasburg, and Walsh. Organizations include Valleywide Health Services, Sunrise Community Health Center, Summit Care Clinic, Salud Family Health, Pueblo Community Health Center, Plains Medical Center, Peak Vista Community Health Center, Northwest Colorado Dental Coalition, Marillac Clinic, Health District of Northern Larimer County, Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo, and the Colorado Department of Corrections.

Students may request an alternate means of meeting the requirement that half of their practice be in a distant community. Typical reasons include being a single parent, a parent of children at extremely dependent ages, and some job schedules. In these cases, students are assigned to practice with ACTS partners in communities more distant from the campus, but readily commutable. The communities are Brighton, Fort Lupton, Frederick, and Longmont. Salud Family Health operates facilities in these communities and students have an opportunity to serve non-urban populations in them.

**Housing and Travel**

When needed, housing will be arranged for rural affiliations by the AHEC Coordinator. Students must register on-line with AHEC for every ACTS affiliation, whether you use housing or not. When housing is needed, students can request it with the AHEC registration. Housing requests need to be made six weeks ahead of time. Please follow the step-by-step guide distributed during the ACTS orientation or go to the AHEC section of the ACTS website ([www.CUacts.com](http://www.CUacts.com)). The Colorado AHEC System maintains housing for CU students in many rural communities. Please note that housing is coed, and you may be living with students from other Anschutz Medical Campus schools, Regis University, or other higher education institutions in the region.

As is true anywhere, please protect yourself and your personal belongings when out on an ACTS affiliation. Use common sense -- lock your car and house, secure your belongings, ask for directions from your preceptor, let someone who knows the community acquaint you with it.
Also, prepare yourself for inclement weather! Before setting out on a trip, please check weather forecasts and check road conditions at the Colorado Department of Transportation’s website, www.cotrip.org. It’s also a good idea to download CDOTmobile, a road conditions app for smartphones. Use good judgment when driving, especially in remote areas. We want you to arrive safely at your destination and return safely to your home. The University of Colorado is unable to reimburse for damage to personal vehicles or loss of personal property.

**Didactic weeks**

Didactic weeks take place during the DS4 year to provide the final semester’s coursework. Courses in practice management, ethics, jurisprudence, forensics, and restorative dentistry are provided during didactic weeks. These weeks also provide opportunities for board review and orientations for subsequent affiliations. Students do not receive ACTS clinical credit for Didactic Weeks. Didactic Weeks are indicated on the school’s clinic schedule. Students must plan to attend class throughout these weeks. A typical day will consist of multiple lectures from 9-12 and from 1-5. Detailed schedules of topics and speakers may not be available until shortly before a Didactic Week begins. Lectures will be held on the AMC, except for the single day scheduled at the Colorado Dental Association building (located near Hampden Avenue and Yosemite Street). Course material will be provided by school-based faculty members and outside speakers. Attendance is required and, due to the nature of the presentations, students will find it extremely difficult to successfully remediate absences. However, these are academic courses and a grade of “P” is required for graduation. This is NOT free time, so do not make travel or other plans for these weeks.

**Completion Timeline**

Students complete ACTS by practicing to the satisfaction of their preceptors during all of the weeks indicated for ACTS in the school’s clinic schedule. Some students may earn advance-credit by practicing in the school’s mobile dental clinic at rural locations during the summer months, during weeks not designated for ACTS in the clinic schedule. That credit may be used to make up for time away from ACTS that exceeds the standard maximum allowances for illness and personal/professional leave. However, to use that leave, a student must plan ahead and schedule it through Dr. Berg and Karen, to avoid disruption to the ACTS clinic’s operations. The final task in the ACTS Program is to
participate in an exit interview to give and receive feedback on the ACTS experience.

In some cases, the CRB or the Student Performance Committee (SPC) may withhold approval for a student to participate in ACTS. A student cannot earn credit toward completion of ACTS during a period of time in which she/he is not approved for the program. The weeks missed must be made up after the spring semester has ended. With SPC approval, such a student can participate in the May commencement ceremony and then continue practicing in ACTS afterward. A student who has not completed ACTS by the end of the spring semester will receive an “incomplete” (grade of “IP”) in the final ACTS clinical course. With SPC approval, if ACTS is successfully completed by the end of the summer term, the student will receive a diploma with the May commencement date.

**Clinical Practice Issues**

*Supervision*

ACTS students provide care only under the direct supervision of a licensed dentist who also holds a faculty appointment at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine. Direct supervision means that the preceptor is on the premises and aware of what the student is doing at all times. Specifically, all cutting of hard and soft tissues must be done with the preceptor's prior knowledge and approval. Professional liability coverage through the School of Dental Medicine’s insurance is maintained only when these conditions are met!

Preceptors who haven't worked with a given student before will have only a general idea of his/her clinical preparation and competence. Students should discuss their clinical strengths and weaknesses with preceptors at the beginning of each affiliation. During the ACTS Program, students will most certainly encounter situations, procedures or philosophies with which they have little or no experience. *Students, please ask your preceptor for guidance or help any time you’re not sure how to proceed!* Preceptors are there to assist students in the transition from dental student to graduate dental professional.

- Students should rely on preceptors’ expertise! They have a responsibility to inform their preceptor when they encounter new or difficult situations.
- Preceptors should monitor and mentor their students! They have a responsibility to create an environment for learning.

One of the most common reasons for communication failure in all areas of life is reliance on mind-reading. Mental telepathy is not an approved communication tool in the ACTS Program. If you think you know what someone else is thinking, you are almost certainly incorrect. If you think someone else will figure out what you want/need, you are almost certainly doomed to disappointment.
Informed Consent

Patients must be allowed to give informed consent for treatment by a student dentist. In the general consents obtained at the SoDM clinics, patients agree to be treated by students. Student dentists are readily identifiable to patients in the SoDM student clinic.

ACTS clinics should include in the general consent they obtain from patients that the clinic is a training site affiliated with the University of Colorado and that care will be provided either by a licensed dentist or by a CU dental student practicing under direct supervision of a licensed dentist. At a preceptor’s discretion, a separate consent form may be used, but it is not necessary. In the opinion of the Chancellor’s Office of Legal Counsel, including this in a general consent for treatment will fulfill all obligations for disclosure and informed consent. To aid patients in making informed decisions, the University of Colorado requires that students wear either their CU photo ID or a suitable substitute nametag at ACTS sites.

Protocol for Accidental Exposure to Body Fluids:
Needle/instrument/bur injuries

Accidental exposures to body fluids are serious incidents and they are handled differently at ACTS sites than at the School of Dental Medicine campus-based clinics. When such an injury/exposure occurs off-campus at an ACTS clinic, the cost of responding to the incident is covered by the university’s Worker Compensation insurance. Initial treatment provided at the ACTS clinic may be reimbursed by the university, but whenever feasible the initial treatment be provided at the University of Colorado Hospital’s Infectious Disease Clinic.

Whenever it is feasible, the university requires that the medical response to such an incident be managed directly by the university’s Infectious Disease Clinic staff. When an incident occurs, the student should immediately contact them at 720-848-0191. Their address and hours of operation are shown below.

After contacting the Infectious Disease Clinic, the student must complete a School of Dental Medicine Post-Exposure Management Report Form and fax it to Ms. Fabian Walker at 303-724-7066. A blank form can be obtained from the preceptor’s files, downloaded from www.cuacts.com, or faxed to the ACTS Clinic by Fabian if you call her at 303-724-7110. NOTE: All information and forms for dealing with accidental exposures to body fluids is available at the ACTS website, www.cuacts.com.
Best practices regarding accidental exposure to body fluids continue to evolve. The current protocols can be accessed on the internet at the university’s Risk Management office website and can be easily accessed through [www.cuacts.com](http://www.cuacts.com)

Where is the Infectious Disease Clinic?
Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion, 7th Floor
Anschutz Medical Campus
1635 North Ursula Street
Aurora, CO 80045
Phone: 720-848-0191

What are the hours at the Infectious Disease Clinic?
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
Thursday: 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Friday: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

Where do you go when the Infectious Disease Clinic isn’t open?
UCH Emergency Department
Anschutz Inpatient Pavilion
University of Colorado Denver Hospital
Anschutz Medical Campus
Aurora, CO

*** Note again: All of the information about accidental exposures to body fluids is always available on the web at [www.cuacts.com](http://www.cuacts.com)

**Beginning an Affiliation**

**Introductions**
After receiving a confirmation memo for an affiliation, students are required to contact their preceptors. *Students - Please do this!* A preceptor is responsible for orienting students to office policies and procedures. *Preceptors - please do this!* It's really important to introduce students to the staff and show them around the facility. Preceptors should also make their expectations about work hours, activities, and lines of authority clear. Of course, it's also essential to discuss clinical strengths, weaknesses, and expectations. To facilitate this discussion, a “new affiliation checklist” is provided to students. *Preceptors - Please make sure you go over all of the points on that form with your student, then both of you initial the form and fax it back to us 303-724-7039.*
Schedules, Work Rules, and ID badges

Students have time off for holidays that may occur within an ACTS affiliation: Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. However, in the event of inclement weather, students must follow the schedule of their ACTS clinic, regardless of whether or not the AMC is open or closed.

Office dress code should be followed; most offices will simply ask students to wear scrubs. Legally, when treating patients, a student must wear a name tag that identifies her/him as a student dentist. Our Office of Legal Counsel strongly recommends that CU students wear their CU photo ID while practicing at ACTS sites. An ACTS clinic may require that a student also wear an ID issued by that clinic.

Communication

During affiliations, preceptors and students may be contacted from time to time by the ACTS faculty by telephone and/or in person during site visits. Please do not hesitate to call Dr. Berg (303-724-7032) or Ms. Tawara-Jones (303-724-7030) should problems or questions arise. You can also email us at Rob.Berg@ucdenver.edu or Karen.Tawara@ucdenver.edu

The most important piece of paperwork may be one that is not required. Students – If it feels appropriate, a thank-you note to your preceptor following an affiliation is often really appreciated. Plus, a preceptor may be willing to be a reference after graduation or to tell their dentist friends about you. Don't overlook this occasion to make a good impression!

Students – Although dental school can be extremely frustrating and emotionally taxing at times, please remember that professional behavior is absolutely required whenever you’re in ACTS. Successful completion of an ACTS affiliation includes meeting your obligations in a completely professional manner.
Important points for a preceptor and student to discuss on the first day at an ACTS clinic

- What are my hours while I’m practicing at your clinic?
  - When should I arrive in the morning on a typical day?
  - When should I plan on eating lunch and for how long?
  - When should I expect to be able to leave on a typical day?

- How is my patient schedule determined?
  - Do I have a column in the schedule?
  - Who assigns patients to me for treatment?
  - About how much time will I have with each scheduled patient? (e.g. operative)
  - How are walk-in patients handled?
  - Who is my direct supervisor while I’m at the clinic and who will co-sign my patient treatment notes?

- How should I interact with the clinic staff?
  - What are the staff members’ names and titles?
  - Do individual staff members have specific responsibilities?
  - What are my responsibilities regarding setup/teardown?
  - Who should I ask about help with:
    - scheduling?
    - instruments or supplies?
    - sterilization?
    - radiographs?
    - assistance during patient care?
  - Do you have staff meetings? If so, what should my role be?

- What should I do during any free time I might have? (e.g. if I finish an appointment early or a patient no-shows)

- Do we both understand what we need to do if there’s needlestick or instrument injury? (The answer is always available at www.cuacts.com)
What’s your clinic’s protocol for patient concerns/complaints?

What’s the end-of-day protocol at this clinic?
- At what time should I plan to complete care for my last patient?
- What are my responsibilities after I dismiss my last patient?
- Who should I talk to before I leave for the day?

Students should speak with the office manager, the lead dental assistant and/or the dentist to find out about the following:

- Office policies
- Scheduling/rescheduling patients/recall systems
- Financial policies
- Charting system - who puts entry into chart?
- Front desk protocol
- How and where all the equipment is controlled, including handpiece air and water controls, x-ray Kvp and other settings
- Infection control procedures for the office, including instrument and handpiece sterilization procedures

Patient Safety

- Before treating any patients, students must determine what emergency procedures are in place. Locating oxygen, emergency drug kit, and appropriate phone numbers is mandatory.
- Students should not perform any procedure on a patient they are not comfortable performing: “Do no harm!”

Recommendations for students on how to be accepted and appreciated at a new ACTS assignment

- When you use something, find out where it belongs and put it back there when you’re done with it. The office personnel don’t like looking for misplaced items when they need them.
- Help your assistant with operatory set-up and break-down. If you’re sharing an assistant with someone else, offer to do your own set-up/break-down if it will allow her/him to assist the other dentist with a clinical procedure while you’re doing this.
- When people don’t know you well, they draw huge conclusions from small things they see you doing.
Don't take phone calls in/near a treatment area. Put your cell phone on “silent” while you’re treating patients.

Avoid sitting in front of a computer screen. When a student (or a preceptor, for that matter) is described as a “slacker,” the most common example given is that he/she “sits in front of a computer while everyone else is working hard.”

If you’re on the phone in an appropriate area like a break-room, don’t put your feet up, slouch, or look too comfortable. This sounds nuts, but it’s the second most common reason that students (or preceptors) get labeled as slackers.

Find ways to stay busy (so you don’t get bored) and make your co-workers feel like you’re a member of their team! If you don’t have patient care to provide, you can volunteer to:

- pull charts for tomorrow
- file charts
- see if developer/fixer needs to be changed
- clean the darkroom
- mount x-rays or assist/chart for dentist or hygienist
- pick up the reception area, straighten magazines

Be sure to arrive on time for clinic. There are two common ways to interpret time-related behavior:

- (a) People who are late are showing disrespect
- (b) People who are on-time don’t have enough to do

Both interpretations are equally false, but (a) persists in the minds of many people

Stay until everyone is done. Leaving before all the work is done is the other second-most-common reason people get labeled as slackers.

Admit what you don’t know and to ask for help when you need it!
Time Away from Affiliations

Absence for personal or professional reasons
Sometimes circumstances require students to be away from an ACTS affiliation. When this can be anticipated, students are required to inform Dr. Berg six weeks in advance, so patients at an ACTS clinic will not be scheduled for those dates. Some absences, for example residency interviews, may be unexpected and necessary with little notice. In these cases, the student must inform the program director and preceptor without delay. Students are allowed a maximum three days of this type of leave without having to make it up. With proper notice, you can take more days away from ACTS, but you’ll be required to make up anything more than three days total at the end of the semester.

Absence for illness or bereavement
If you or someone for whom you’re responsible is ill, this is certainly a legitimate reason for absence from a clinic session. Absence surrounding the loss of a loved one is also, of course, a legitimate reason for absence. However, you MUST provide your preceptor with as much notice of your situation as possible. At the beginning of a affiliation, ask your preceptor who to contact in the event of illness and follow their instructions. At minimum, you must contact your preceptor no later than the beginning of the clinic session you will miss. You are allowed up to five days of illness/bereavement leave without having to make up the time. If you need more time away, you’ll have to make it up at the end of the semester.

Unexcused Absence
Most students are professional and responsible about their schedules, turning up for work every day they’re expected at their clinic. Unfortunately, that’s not always true. Unexcused absences inconvenience patients and disrupt operations at your preceptor’s clinic. As a result, this could lead to substantial penalties, at the discretion of your preceptor. If a student arrives significantly late (“late” as determined by the preceptor) for a clinic session, the penalty will be loss of ACTS credit for that half-day session. Of course, a student in that position might think, “Ok, then I just won’t come in until this afternoon.” But if a student is completely absent from a session without permission, the penalty will be twice that assessed for lateness (i.e., loss of two half-days of credit for each one half-day of unexcused absence).
**ACTS Preceptors**

The ACTS preceptors are faculty members at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine, Department of Applied Dentistry. They’re also the staff dentists for these safety net clinics, which are an important community resource.

They choose to be ACTS preceptors because they truly enjoy teaching! They find [most of] your questions interesting and they find your curiosity stimulating. Together, they have created a model for dental education that is still one of a kind in the United States.

Every CU dental graduate has the opportunity to practice in ACTS throughout the final year of school. For the Class of 2013 in this year of transition to our new scheduling model, each student will practice 70-80 days. When our new schedule is fully implemented, each student will complete 90 days in ACTS. Although this is somewhat less than the 100 days per student of our past model, the median among US dental schools for community-based practice is 20 days. That translates into a tremendous amount of experience for CU alums, compared to alums of other schools. For example, here at CU our dental students graduate with average nearly four times as many operative dentistry experiences in ACTS clinics as they do in school-based clinics. Nearly two-thirds of a CU graduate’s experience in non-surgical extraction occurs in ACTS and approximately one-third of experiences in fixed prosthodontics occur in ACTS.

After completing ACTS, 90 percent of our graduates indicated moderate or large increases in self-assessed competence in diagnosing and treating dental emergencies. Other areas of increased self-reported competence included geriatrics (83.3 percent), interpersonal skills for patient and staff management (85.0 percent), and overall confidence in clinical skills (96.7 percent).

Our graduates are “generally” or “very” willing to provide care to low income patients (85.5 percent), pediatric patients (74.5 percent), handicapped patients (72.7 percent), medically compromised patients (83.6 percent), and geriatric patients (89.1 percent). In their exit surveys, about 16 percent of our graduates indicate they plan to practice in the public sector after dental school.

The CU dental school makes a considerable commitment of curriculum time to community-based education – perhaps the largest such commitment in dental education at this time. We hope you find it as rewarding as it was for those who graduated before you.

**Welcome to ACTS!**