



U.S. COAST GUARD



Homeland Security

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DENTAL READINESS

*"For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For the want of the shoe, the horse was lost;
For the want of a horse, the rider was lost;
For the want of the rider, the battle was lost;
For the want of the battle, the kingdom was lost;
And all for the want of a nail."*

Swap "nail" for "tooth" in Ben Franklin's axiom and you've captured part of the challenge of today's Coast Guard - dental readiness.

The cost for Coast Guard dental care alone runs into the tens of millions of dollars, and unhealthy dental conditions dramatically erode the readiness of the Coast Guard. This has never been so evident than with the recent escalation in active duty and reservist deployments.

Achieving the Commandant's Direction in People, Readiness, and Stewardship, the dental clinics at Training Center Cape May and the Academy focus on preparing qualified graduates for Coast Guard units worldwide. This mission is accomplished without compromising training and meets the readiness needs of the Coast Guard and the needs of Coast Guard people.

FY03 data from Cape May indicated that 3,325, (73%) of recruits arrived at Cape May in unhealthy condition (needing dental treatment ranging from routine to acute care), yet 4,525, (99%) of active duty recruits departed for their first duty station in a state of dental health, Class 1 condition - only 61 recruits (1.06%) graduated in poorer than Class 1 condition. These are remarkable statistics and illustrate just how hard our accession point clinics are working to send members to the field in a state of dental readiness or health to perform Coast Guard missions. Members in a state of good dental health are less likely to require MEDEVAC or emergency treatment when deployed.

Our next challenge is to increase the existing level of dental readiness and health in the field. The first step towards achieving this goal is the annual dental examination. With the recent implementation of the Dental Common Access System (DENCAS), the Coast Guard can now view the dental status of each active duty and Reserve member for an entire unit. DENCAS currently shows that 34% of all Coast Guard active duty and Reserve members (33% active duty and 38% Reserve) are overdue for their required annual dental examination. We should reduce this to 10% within the next two years, and maintain at least a 90% annual compliance rate. Commands must ensure that all of our active duty and Reserve members fulfill their requirement for an annual dental examination and complete all needed dental treatments. By working together to reach this goal, the Coast Guard will be rewarded with a healthier and more ready workforce.

Regards,

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