INTRODUCTION

One strategy of FQHCs to ensure sufficient workforce capacity to meet patient demand for oral health services was participation in dental student externship/community service learning programs and/or dental residency programs. Dental residents and student externs enlarged workforce capacity, improved workflows, and increased efficiency of oral health service delivery in many of the health centers.

Working with diverse patients in community health settings exposed students and residents to high needs populations and performing a large number of surgical and restorative procedures for high needs patients appeared to result in greater confidence and increased competence providing those services. Dental students and residents were also a potential source of new workforce for safety net health centers.

This study aimed to describe FQHCs participation in dental education and dental residency programs and to describe whether this participation created a pipeline for recruitment of dentists to work in safety net organizations.

METHODS

This study used a web-based survey. An email solicitation was sent to dental directors or chief executive officers of 1,275 FQHCs with FQHC designation in 2014. Ninety seven emails had at least one new dentist who had completed a residency at the FQHC. The participation rate with dental student extern programs was 39% and 44% of those programs had at least one new dentist for work in the FQHC after graduation.

Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square testing, t-tests, and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests. Significance was defined as P<0.05 using 2-tailed tests.

RESULTS

At survey closure, 304 FQHCs had completed the survey for a response rate of 25.8%.

About 81% of FQHCs provided direct dental services to their patients in their clinics. More than 88% provided oral health preventive services.

Nearly 60% of FQHCs provided 4 or more types of oral health services.