

Episode: **Author Interview: “What Primary Care Innovation Teaches Us About Oral Health Integration”**

Guest: Ann Greiner, MCP

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[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview Series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me today as Ann Greiner, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Primary Care Collaborative, which defines and implements advocacy, research, and education agendas to promote comprehensive, team-based, and patient-centered primary care. She's here to discuss her article coauthored with Anita Glicken, [What Primary Care Innovation Teaches Us About Oral Health Integration](#), in the January 2022 issue of *The Journal*, [Inequity Along the Medical/Dental Divide](#). Ann, thank you so much for being on the podcast today. [music fades out]

ANN GREINER: I'm very pleased to be here. Thank you.

HOFF: To begin with, what's the main ethics point of your article?

GREINER: The ethical issue that this article focuses on is the lack of oral health coverage for all Americans and particularly for those from poor and marginalized communities. About one third of Americans have no access to oral health coverage, and it is worse for Black and Brown folks and people in these more vulnerable communities. Individuals living in such communities have higher rates of tooth decay and partial and full tooth loss than their white counterparts, as well as lower rates of annual dental visits. This all was exacerbated during COVID-19 when people were less likely to visit primary care, get health care in general, and were less likely to go to the dentist. Coming out of the pandemic, as we slowly are, we think that there's an opportunity to reinvent our health care system, and that reinvention should include changes to care delivery, including the integration of oral health into primary care.

HOFF: And just broadly, what are some of those steps to integrate oral health into primary care? What does that look like?

GREINER: We really need to simultaneously reform care delivery and payment. And so, if we are focused on achieving better outcomes for patients, we're going to think more holistically about patients. We're going to think not only about their medical needs, but also about their behavioral health, their oral health, and whether or not they have social vulnerabilities that need to be addressed so they can be restored to health. And it is these kinds of primary care practices that are more whole-person oriented that we want to really move our system towards. That will take not only innovators who think about a more comprehensive kind of primary care, but also a different payment system: systems that reward better population health, the closing of health inequities, and are more affordable. And these kinds of payment systems are really, they look very different than the kinds of

payment systems we have today. They're prospectively oriented, and they invest more in a wider range of services to really provide whole-person care.

HOFF: Wonderful. And what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

GREINER: The most important point I'd like to make for those that are in education and training environments is that they really need to prepare for a future where the incentive systems are quite different. Incentives will in the future not be based on volume or the amount of services that you deliver, but rather on value. And I'd like to define value as focused on cost and quality and equity. And if we have a system that incents on those attributes, I think, we'll all have a very different kind of approach to delivery, and we'll have different outcomes.

HOFF: Great. And to wrap up, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't get to fully explore, what would that be?

GREINER: The point that I would add is that one important strategy to address the inequities that exist in terms of those that do and do not have access to oral health services is the integration of oral health into primary care or primary care into dental offices. There's a maldistribution, or maldistribution rather, in where dental health professionals are located. And primary care has, while there's still some distribution with respect to primary care, there's much more prevalence of primary care practices across the country. And so, we really see that this integration of oral health into primary care can help to address maldistribution and better enable our health care system to provide dental health services for folks from more marginalized and vulnerable communities. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Well, Ann, thank you so much for your expertise on this topic and for your contribution to the Journal and to the podcast.

GREINER: Wonderful to be here. Thank you.

HOFF: To read the full article as well as the rest of the January 2022 issue for free, visit our site, [JournalofEthics.org](https://www.journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.