

VDA VOLUNTEERS DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF ONGOING ORAL CARE IN NURSING HOMES

By: Joel Rubin, President, Rubin Communications Group



It's been called an "epidemic," the poor state of teeth and gums among the nearly 1.4-million nursing home residents in the United States. Research supports links between oral health and cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health, arthritis, and pneumonia. These chronic conditions are particularly prevalent in the long-term care population.

That's why the Virginia Dental Association, in partnership with the Virginia Dental Hygienists Association and Virginia's nursing homes, is urging the state to consider funding a study that could lead to financing oral health care for Medicaid patients, who represent 60% of the 28,000 skilled care facility residents in Virginia. Currently Medicaid provides little or no coverage for these procedures, which the VDA believes is shortsighted since poor oral health can lead to more complicated conditions requiring expensive hospital stays.

The VDA and its partners shined a light on the problem during a screening June 20 at the Envoy of Westover Hills nursing home in south Richmond. In half a day, 12 volunteer oral health care specialists, including VDA dentists, hygienists, assistants and a VCU dental student, screened and in some cases treated 52 residents, providing \$6,000.00 worth of dental services.

Prevention, claim organizers, is the key to keeping residents healthy. "We've known for a long time that water fluoridation and sealants keep kids from getting cavities and decreases the overall cost of dental care," says Richmond area orthodontist Dr. Frank Luomo, who heads up a special VDA Access to Care Task Force. "So it's the same principle. You just carry it to the geriatric population."

The VDA contends a study would not only demonstrate the extent of the problem but also suggest options. "What if we had a dental coordinator in every nursing home who could help people keep their teeth clean, assist the staff in coordinating care that's beyond what can be delivered on site and then either get a provider in or take that person to a nearby VDA dentist," says Dr. Ted Sherwin, President of the VDA. "It would save the state quite a bit of money in the long run and bring important relief to some of our most vulnerable citizens."

For Dr. Patricia Bonwell, who has a PhD in gerontology and is a dental hygienist at Lucy Corr Village in Chesterfield County, the goal is help nursing home residents "get healthy and stay healthy for the remaining time of their lives."

MAKE A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE: START A NEW M.O.M. PROJECT

By: Tracy van Marcke; Dental Opportunities Champion, Virginia Health Care Foundation



Are hardworking people where you live going without dental care because they can't afford it? Do you want to make a difference?

If so, you could be the spark your community needs to begin planning a Missions of Mercy (MOM) project in your

area. Often, one dentist is the impetus for bringing the many facets of a MOM project to a new area.

Nothing is more rewarding than the satisfaction of implementing a successful MOM and experiencing the gratitude and joy of the many people who receive dental care there.

Money to Get You Started

To encourage the MOMs in localities that have never had them, the Virginia Health Care Foundation (VHCF) is making \$10,000 in seed grants available for up to five new MOMs.

The first of these grants was awarded to the Suffolk MOM, where Dr. Ralph Howell assembled a team of local dentists and other leaders to provide much needed dental care to 500 people one Saturday last March.

A typical MOM project requires about \$50,000 in cash and in-kind contributions. Seed money from VHCF can make a significant dent in the amount needed and be an effective stimulus for local giving.

Lots of Help At Every Step

Local MOM projects are led by an organizing group in each community. They get lots of help from the Virginia Dental Association Foundation (VDAF), which provides the necessary mobile dental equipment and supplies; helps recruit dentists to volunteer; coordinates with Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Dentistry to provide dental students; assists with vetting possible sites; and gives overall guidance and great advice.

It can take 9-18 months for an organizing group to plan and prepare for a MOM, depending on the pace of the local leadership team. To inform your efforts, VHCF and VDAF have written a detailed

guidebook that lays out all that it takes to put on a MOM. There's even a corresponding booklet with all of the sample forms and protocols you might need. These are available at www.vhcf.org or in hard copy from VHCF.

A Visible Difference

Since the VDAF launched the first MOM 15 years ago, hundreds of volunteer dentists from the VDA have provided more than \$3.8 million in donated care and treated more than 54,000 patients via 75 MOMs.

Each MOM project has generated great visibility locally. In some communities, like Martinsville, Orange County, the Eastern Shore, Gloucester and Mathews counties, and the City of Roanoke, they have even become a springboard to establish dental safety net clinics.

Interested in giving back to your community?

Learn more by contacting Beth Vann-Turnbull at VDAF (804-523-2181) or Tracy van Marcke at VHCF (804-828-5804). You can also review the MOM implementation guide and seed money information at www.vhcf.org.