

Tackling oral healthcare issues together



The fight to improve oral health and access to treatment for underserved people has escalated to new levels of awareness and care – and for good reason.

The dental community is responding with a powerful surge to push oral health awareness to the forefront. The Dental Trade Alliance (DTA) – an association of companies that provides dental equipment, supplies, materials and services to dentists and other oral care professionals – and the DTA Foundation helped form a coalition of more than 35 dental organizations called The Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives to focus on improving oral health in America. The coalition partnered with the Ad Council to launch the **2min2x** oral health awareness campaign targeting parents and caregivers of children up to age 12. This creative series of multimedia ads, which includes entertaining music videos posted on **2min2x.org**, emphasizes the importance of brushing two minutes, twice a day. Patterson Dental has joined efforts to promote this campaign as it continues to build momentum across the country.

Patterson Companies President and CEO Scott Anderson, who serves as chairman of the DTA board, said, “Improving oral health and access to care continues to be a top priority for DTA leadership, as well as for Patterson Dental and many others in our great industry. By uniting and being involved as a dental community, we can help more people live healthier lives – and that’s exciting.”

Serving Those in Need

Michigan Community Dental Clinics, Inc. (MCDC) is an example of a nonprofit organization making dental care more accessible. Staffed by 60 doctors, MCDC’s network of 22 clinics across Michigan had more than 190,000 patient visits last year. About 85 percent of MCDC’s patients are on Medicaid. MCDC also targets the working poor and uninsured, offering reduced fee plans based on income levels. About 60 percent of patients are children. “We do not compete with private practitioners,” said MCDC’s chief dental officer Dr. Gregory Heintschel, who also



sits on the MCDC board of directors. He noted that there are situations in which traditional insurance is accepted, such as when access to care is problematic or a patient needs to be seen in the hospital or referred to an MCDC specialist, for example.

Dr. Heintschel joined MCDC about six years ago to help the people he couldn't help in his 20 years of private practice. The doctor's work now is largely administrative, although he still practices occasionally alongside MCDC doctors in more of a mentor role.

"Many of our patients have been in pain and agony for a long time because there are very few places where they can get help," Dr. Heintschel said. The alternative is often costly hospital emergency room visits for pain medication while the source of the problem goes untreated. "Patients we've treated tell us they feel like they can smile again and how good that makes them feel," Dr. Heintschel said. He recalled a patient who said she feels she can finally go into the school with her young daughter and not be embarrassed by her teeth. "We're also seeing that dentists are happy to have us in their communities because they now have a referral source for these patients," Dr. Heintschel noted.

But the MCDC mission goes beyond changing lives and filling a need in communities: MCDC is out to change the perception of public health dentistry. "We want to put public health dentistry on par with the type of care, providers and facilities that one finds in a top-notch private practice," Dr. Heintschel explained. He said creating a positive patient experience – and recruiting and retaining top-notch doctors and staff – starts with having high-end equipment and facilities. "As we look to extend the MCDC network to new communities, the ability to showcase these impressive facilities to the Board of Health and county commissioners is another great selling point."

Equipped to Serve

In December, MCDC worked closely with Patterson Dental to open a new 4,350-square-foot clinic in Traverse City, Mich., in association with the Health Department and the Northwest Community Health Agency.

"Patterson is a great strategic partner who comes to the table with efficient, ergonomic designs for our clinics," the doctor continued. Patterson equipment specialist Rick Coppens and his team design for optimal patient flow and maximum efficiency, following MCDC model standards so the floor plan and equipment stay familiar for personnel moving between clinics.

Having equipment that lasts is another high priority. "With quality equipment and technology, the cost of ownership and

value over time help us reduce our costs, and in turn, help more people," Dr. Heintschel said. The 12-operatory clinic in Traverse City is equipped with A-dec cabinetry, two 16-foot A-dec ICC sterilization centers and other top names in sterilization like the SciCan HYDRIM and Midmark M11. Air Techniques provided mechanicals, including the compressor and vacuum.

The doctor also relies on Patterson representative Mark Ames, whom he views as an employee, even though Ames doesn't draw an MCDC paycheck. "Mark works very hard for us and his heart is in our mission, just like MCDC employees." Joe Vaughn and the Patterson service team have also played a key role in minimizing downtime during the transition to the new clinic.

"MCDC and Patterson have a true partnership," Patterson Grand Rapids Branch Manager Dan Redifer commented. "We are all working toward the same goal of providing excellent healthcare to the community. At Patterson, we try to be available and responsive to MCDC as they change and the healthcare environment changes. The work MCDC is doing in Michigan is clearly changing lives and we are honored to play a role in the service this organization provides."



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