

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Oral Health

Wisconsin hospitals share a common mission to improve their community's health status, which includes oral health care, an area often neglected because people cannot afford dental work. Lack of proper dental care can lead to a myriad of other health problems. Those with severe tooth pain often end up in hospital emergency rooms for pain relief. By increasing access to dental services for those who cannot afford it, hospitals are not only improving the overall health of their communities, but also decreasing the burden on their emergency departments.

Diane's story

Diane Patterson, 52, works only part time, receives an income under 200 percent of poverty levels and has no dental insurance. She began experiencing severe pain in one of her lower molars and did not know where to go for help. A friend told her to call the 211 @ IMPACT help line, and she learned of urgent-care services at Seton Dental Clinic, sponsored by Columbia St. Mary's (CSM).

When Patterson first came to the clinic, the dentist, Dr. Charles Kosowski, D.D.S., told her she had a blood pressure of 160/110—too high to have the painful tooth extracted. She was surprised: "I never knew I had high blood pressure, but it does run in my family." Patterson was referred to the Columbia St. Mary's Community-based Chronic Disease Management Clinic (CCDM) for a medical evaluation, with instruction to return to Seton when her blood pressure was under control.

Three weeks later, Patterson came back to Seton, presenting documentation from CCDM to show that her blood pressure was now being treated and monitored. She was grateful for the care she received at the CCDM Clinic, saying, "I went to the one at 205 East Concordia. I never will forget that address; they have been so good to me. I get my blood-pressure medicine for free!"

Patterson was given an appointment with Dr. Kosowski right away and, with a blood pressure reading in the normal range, had the painful tooth extracted. "That doctor is so nice; everyone has been so nice," she said.

Then, despite just having had a tooth extracted, she flashed the biggest smile that she could.



Diane and her favorite dentist, Dr. Charles Kosowski, D.D.S.

Columbia St. Mary's, Inc., Milwaukee

FCCHC offers dental services to underserved residents

Historically, access to oral health services has been a significant challenge for underserved residents in the Fox Valley, as few dental providers are able to cost-effectively treat Medicaid and uninsured patients. Wisconsin ranks in the bottom five states nationally for the amount of money allocated to its dental Medicaid program. In 2008, less than 20 percent of Medicaid/Badger Care recipients were able to receive dental services and the access issues for uninsured individuals are even more significant.

The statistics supporting the oral health needs in the Fox Valley communities are grim. Without action, the downward slide of dental services to the poor will accelerate. The Fox Cities Community Health Center (FCCHC), located in Menasha, Wis., added dental services in early 2009 after recognizing the decline in access to oral health in the area. The FCCHC dental department had over 4,200 visits in the first year.

In order to meet the growing needs of better access to dental services, in early 2011 the FCCHC moved its dental clinic

(continued on next page)

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

to an office location allowing for more patients to access services. Since the new clinic location, it is up 80 visits per month, now averaging 1,000 visits per month.

The FCCHC, a community-initiated, non-profit organization, originally formed in 1997 with strong ties to local health systems, public health departments and the university system. This “free clinic” was created through a partnership of Affinity Health System and ThedaCare in response to the closure of state-funded county voucher programs for medical care. The FCCHC maximized local charity care programs and provided free care to uninsured patients.

In 2004, FCCHC was funded as a Community Health Center and Health Care for the Homeless program, the only combined program in the state of Wisconsin. Today, the in-kind and financial support of Affinity Health System and ThedaCare are an important partner in providing care. In the Fox Valley area, there continues to be a lack of coordinated, comprehensive primary and preventive care for individuals facing financial, cultural and linguistic barriers. FCCHC is the only safety net clinic in the area, providing necessary primary and preventive services to more than 7,000 individuals that otherwise would not have access to care.

The mission of FCCHC is to create a vibrant community through health care access and quality service delivery to the underserved. FCCHC offers primary care, preventive dental care and mental health services at the main facility in Menasha, Wis., in the heart of the tri-county service area of Winnebago, Outagamie and Calumet County. Additional primary care, case management, and AODA services are provided through the center’s Healthcare for the Homeless Program at the regional emergency shelter in Appleton. All fees are based on a sliding fee ranging from \$20-\$80 depending on monthly income and family size, however no one is turned away for ability to pay.

FCCHC has significant experience providing primary care services to the community’s most at-risk population and is the only non-profit organization providing these services in the Fox Valley area. FCCHC has maximized collaborative relationships with local health systems, public health departments and other community service agencies, allowing FCCHC to concentrate on filling gaps in service and providing services to individuals with the greatest needs. FCCHC has grown considerably since its inception, resulting from the community’s investment in FCCHC and its ability to respond to the emerging health care needs of the community.

Affinity Health System

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at www.WiServePoint.org.