Member spotlight

AIDS dental clinics making a difference

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Under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Wilton (Madison), the AIDS Network opened the doors of its 1,357-square-foot dental clinic in August 2010. This enables clients to meet one more need with a single visit.

Dental care access is very difficult for low-income people throughout the state, and most AIDS Network clients fall into that group.

In addition, the state of Wisconsin has identified finding accessible, affordable dental care as one of the top two challenges for people living with HIV/AIDS. The clinic has three operatories to provide dental care services and is open on Mondays and Tuesdays. AIDS Network has staffed the clinic with a dentist, hygienist and a front desk/assistant.

After graduating from the University of Iowa College of Dentistry in 1998, Dr. Wilton completed a hospital-based general practice residency prior to entering private practice in 1999. He has experience providing dentistry in a public health clinic environment on the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile, as well as his private practice experience.

“AIDS Network Dental Clinic is in the start up phase at this point,” said Dr. Wilton. “We’re seeing patients who have been receiving regular dental care at other clinics that the AIDS Network had negotiated with for services. We’re seeing patients who pursued episodic care and others who have had no dental treatment for many years. The patients here are also in different stages in the progression of the disease (HIV/AIDS), which can complicate their dental treatment and relative risk and need for dental services,” Dr. Wilton added.

He concludes, “We’re still assessing the dental needs of the individuals who receive services from the AIDS Network. Talk to me again in a year and I can elaborate on the special needs of the clients of the AIDS Network and the challenges of running the dental clinic at the network.”

ARCW Dental Clinic

The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin is the state’s largest provider of HIV/AIDS medical, dental and mental health services. The dental clinic in Milwaukee and Green Bay provide comprehensive, preventive and restorative dental care to more than
1,200 patients. Of those patients, about 40 percent have no dental insurance.

Dr. Nicole Martin (Milwaukee) took over as the ARCW Dental Clinic Director on Feb. 1, 2010 following the departure of Dr. Steve Debbink (Milwaukee), who held the position for many years.

Upon graduation from Marquette University School of Dentistry in 2003, Dr. Martin began her career at Milwaukee Health Services, a community health center. “I have found that I thoroughly enjoy working in the community. I became a dentist because I wanted to make a difference in people’s lives and I feel like I do that every day at ARCW just by coming to work,” said Dr. Martin.

She oversees three dentists, including Drs. Jessica Mehta and Ajamu Giscombe in Milwaukee and Dr. Brian Schroepfer in Green Bay as well as two hygienists and four dental assistants.

The Green Bay clinic was recently remodeled to provide extra space for additional services. However, this is the final year of a federal grant for the site and Dr. Martin is researching ways to sustain services in the future.

A fifth dental operatory is being added at the Milwaukee clinic and a second part-time hygienist will soon be hired. This growth is supported by many donors and organizations, including the Wisconsin Dental Association Foundation. Since 2008, the WDA Foundation has given $10,500 in grants to the ARCW to further their efforts.

“I most look forward to continuing to provide great dental care to patients who are HIV positive while continuing to strive for better dental access for the patients we serve,” said Dr. Martin.

An estimated 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV, and yet one out of five don’t know it. World AIDS Day, held on Dec. 1, is an opportunity for individuals to learn more about the fight against the disease.

“We all need to continue our education and be aware of the continued medical advances being made in the current treatment for HIV/AIDS. With these advancements, patient with HIV/AIDS are living longer and healthier lives,” said Dr. Martin. “Therefore, the likelihood of every dentist in Wisconsin treating a patient who is HIV positive is quite high and oral health care providers need to be aware of best practices for providing care to patients who are HIV positive.”