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**Greater Milwaukee Dental Association**

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**Wisconsin dentists to donate more than \$763,000 in care to 5,433 poor children for Give Kids A Smile sixth anniversary**

WEST ALLIS, WIS., Jan. 25, 2008 – Some 318 Wisconsin dentists, with help from 760 dental hygienists and assistants, dental and hygiene students and their instructors and community volunteers, will donate an estimated \$763,350 in oral health care and education to 5,433 of the state's low-income children Friday, Feb. 1 and during upcoming weeks in recognition of the sixth annual Give Kids A Smile national children's dental access day.

Wisconsin GKAS events have provided some \$2.1 million in donated dental care to 12,500 low-income children since the program was introduced.

The Wisconsin Dental Association and member dentists work with the state's Department of Health and Family Services, local government agencies, public schools, Head Start, Boys & Girls Clubs and other youth and community organizations to identify low-income children with the greatest need for dental treatment. Please note Wisconsin GKAS events generally are not open to the public.

Nationwide, the American Dental Association expects an estimated 51,000 dental professionals will provide free services to more than 500,000 children at 2,000 sites as part of GKAS 2008. Events range from large-scale dental clinics providing free fillings, cleanings and fluoride treatments to groups of dentists delivering restorative care to underserved children in their private practices to individual dentists offering screenings and educational programs in various locations.

GKAS, a centerpiece of February's National Children's Dental Health Month, was initiated in 2003 by the ADA and state and local dental societies to combat what the U.S. Surgeon General called "a silent epidemic" of dental disease and to encourage parents, health professionals, policy-makers and everyone who cares about children to address this important health issue.

"We appreciate the efforts of those legislators working to improve dental access for low-income patients with a financial investment by state and federal governments. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the state in implementing a long-term, viable solution that takes advantage of the more than 2,000 private dental practices across Wisconsin already 'open for business,'" says WDA President Dr. Monica Hebl of Milwaukee.

GKAS 2008 activities are supported by significant corporate donations from the Colgate-Palmolive Company, DEXIS Digital X-ray and Henry Schein Dental. The Dental Record – A Division of WDA Professional

## **DENTISTS DONATING CARE TO NEEDY KIDS FOR SIXTH YEAR – 2**

Services Inc. also is making children's dental record forms available to Wisconsin GKAS events.

In the Milwaukee area, GKAS is again being celebrated with a large-scale, cooperative effort between the Greater Milwaukee Dental Association, Marquette University School of Dentistry, Madre Angela Dental Clinic, Children's Hospital Pediatric Dental Clinic and numerous private dental offices. Holt Dental Supply, Patterson Dental Company and Omni International are providing additional support and materials. The Marquette University Language Department is offering interpreter services.

Despite sub-zero temperatures on Jan. 19, some 175 volunteers examined 300 children at MUSOD. They took X-rays, applied fluoride varnish and handed out oral health literature. Dozens of dentists and support staff working in participating dental clinics and private offices will provide follow-up care to an estimated 200 children on Feb. 1 and subsequent days as treatment necessitates.

The U.S. Surgeon General recognizes oral health as an integral part of a person's total health, with the dentist being the primary oral health care provider and reports tooth decay is the most common chronic disease affecting American children, five times more common than asthma. Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data shows tooth decay is on the rise among preschoolers, reversing a half-century of progress.

Untreated oral disease has been linked to childhood infections and more catastrophic illnesses such as the abscess that led to the death of a 12-year-old Maryland boy, Deamonte Driver in 2007. More commonly, moderate tooth decay restricts children's daily activities and results in the loss of many millions of hours of classroom time each year.

The ADA recommends children see a dentist within six months of their first tooth erupting or by age one. However, studies reveal only three out of five children have done so by the time they enter kindergarten. This inattention and other barriers to oral care, means that for the first time in 20 years an increasing number (52 percent) of children ages six to eight have tooth decay according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in its Healthy People 2010 oral health update.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (physicians) calls for 20 percent of all health care funds spent on children to be directed at improving and maintaining their oral health. However, Wisconsin and federal governments together spend only about \$38 million, *or less than one percent*, of the total \$4.4 billion annual state Medicaid budget on dental programs for adults *and* children. Four out of every five states spend a higher percentage of MA dollars on dental care for residents of all ages than Wisconsin, according to ADA data.

"Volunteer data collection shows individual WDA dentists donate, on average, \$10,000 - \$12,000 worth of care each year through their private practices, in addition to the free services they provide through GKAS, MA, Donated Dental Services, community clinics and other charitable programs. But charitable care cannot fulfill the oral health care needs of the estimated 864,000 people who seek dental treatment through the state's MA program annually," emphasizes Hebl.

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***February is National Children's Dental Health Month***