Field of Dreams: Mobile Dentistry’s Role in Access to Dental Care

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Our Mission since 1910...

- Primary oral health services
  - Underserved people of all ages
- Promote the value of good oral health
  - Education, outreach, care management
- Advocate for others
  - Limited access to dental care
Serving 18 counties in NW Ohio

- Toledo
  - Uptown Smiles/Tooth Towne
  - Lab services
- Findlay Smiles
- Van Wert Smiles
- Mobile Services
  - Smile Express
  - Portable equipment
Agenda

- Why oral health matters
- Barriers unique to rural communities
- Barriers specific to dentistry
- Struggles/successes of mobile dentistry
- Identify resources and potential partners
More Than a Pretty Smile

- “Window” to the body
- Treating chronic oral inflammation can improve medical treatment outcomes
Oral Health Matters

- **Chronic Inflammation**
  - Heart attack/stroke
  - Diabetes
  - Preterm delivery
  - Alzheimer’s

- **Bacteremia**
  - Endocarditis
  - Cardiac stents
  - Joint replacements
  - Sepsis

- **Quality of Life**
  - Oral Pain
  - Embarrassment
  - Social Isolation

- **Nutrition**
  - Chewing, swallowing
  - Food/drink choices
  - Hydration
  - Tissue repair
Research: Making more connections

- Meningitis
- Cystic fibrosis
- Asthma
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Osteoporosis
- Psoriasis
Documented Barriers

• Lack of Providers
  • Mal-distribution of providers
  • 50+ areas in OH w/o adequate ratio (1:5,000)
• Finances
  • Insured / not insured
• Transportation (Subjective)
  • Building access
• Schedule conflicts
  • Office hours
• Perception of need
  • One of 5 US women having babies has NEVER been to a dentist
Other barriers

- Dental fear / anxiety
- Health literacy
- Classism/ cultural competency
  - Public towards dental care
  - Professionals towards public
    - Soft bigotry
- Culture of Crisis - role of stress
- Opiate Epidemic
- Poverty complicates other barriers.
Patients living in poverty

- Gas money, Reliable car
- Reliability of transportation system
- Jobs won’t approve time off work
- Cultural norms
  - Matriarchal decision making
  - Tobacco habits
Solutions as Barriers

- Cell phones out of minutes
- Dental insurance is often limited
- Insurance disqualifies from other programs
- Medicare
  - No dental coverage
  - Supplemental coverage inadequate
- Medicaid
  - Excellent coverage albeit limited providers
  - Spend down program discontinued 8/1/2016
  - Expansion has resulted in a new definition of “uninsured”. 
Case Review

- Provider
- Finances
- Transportation
- Schedule conflicts
- Perception of need
- Fear
- Health literacy
- Classism/cultural competency
- Poverty
- Culture of crisis
- Opiate epidemic
Dental Center’s Journey
In the beginning….

- 1986, United Way (Toledo) grant
  - Portable equipment
  - 63 Nursing homes
  - Palliative care, primarily
  - 2000 – prevention, maintenance
Sealant program city school
Challenges

- Inadequate power to handpieces / suction
- Finicky materials/supplies
- Limited compliance
  - nursing home staff and patients
- Weight of equipment
- Employing dentists/hygienists
2006 - Smile Express

- 40’ vehicle, 2 dental chairs, digital x-ray, generator, water supply, and hydraulic lift.
- Power issues solved.
- Environment mimics actual office.
- $400,000 to build and equip
  - St. Margarite D’Youville Foundation
  - Junior League of Toledo
  - Mortgage
Benefits of Mobile Dentistry

- Fulfills our mission to serve those with limited resources / access to care.
- Assists agencies with dental mandates to fulfill their mission and meet goals.
  - Rural communities
  - Long term care facilities
  - Schools
  - Pre Schools
Unique needs of dentistry

- Blood borne pathogens
- “out patient surgery”
- Lack of typical public health strategies
- Water, compressed air, aerosols
Unique needs of Mobile Dentistry

Portable Equipment
- Source of electricity
- Linoleum floors
- Water source
- Cargo van/maintenance

Self-contained Vehicle
- Level ground/ Jacks
- Park away from buildings
- Generator/Hydraulic lift
- Water supply
- HVAC system
- Electrical supply
  - Overnight plug
- Insulated plumbing
- Vehicle maintenance
- CDL driver / front desk

Both Paradigms
- Site for sterilization, storage, office work, etc.
Lessons Learned

- Not a *Dental Home*
- School children “graduate” from dental care
- Bathrooms, even on federal holidays
- Limited communication / HER / dead zones
- Overstock in order not to run out
- Lose $5,000 on a good month
- Staff needs to be flexible, creative, and committed
Lessons...

- When we break down, we tell our patients we do not value them.
- Unreliable
  - Transportation x 2
  - Dependence upon integrated systems
    - HVAC, plumbing, hydraulics, radiator, tires,...
Scheduling

Failures
- Special events
- Walk-ins

Successes
- Buy-in from community agencies.
- Broken appointments factored into schedule.
- Same day of week/month
Maintenance

- Vehicle + dental equipment + home/building
- Specialists needed:
  - Hydraulic lift
  - Generator
  - Diesel engine & chassis
  - Exterior washing
- Repair costs
  - Jacks: $2,300
  - Panorex: $12,000
- Plug-in overnight: $8,000, TARTA
Hidden Gem!!

- busesinternational.org
Success Stories

Findlay Smiles

- 1999 Portable Equipment, Children only, beauty salon of a women’s home.
- Bar of an Am Vets hall
- 2001 Salvation Army (800 pt.)
- Fixed Site @ retired DDS office
- 2006 Moved to Family Center
- 2015: 8,200 individual patients

Van Wert Smiles

- 2006 ish: Smile Express
- Dentist was grandson of local family.
- Nov. 2015 Fixed site
We are amazed...

- People are in so much pain that they will drive long distance to another little town and will ENTRUST their swollen face to an unknown professional.
Opinion of DC Staff: Best Use of Mobile Services

- Long term care facilities
- Children
- Gateway to a Dental Home
- Practice Builder
  - Plan to establish fixed site
- Complement to Fixed Sites
  - Bandaid vs Solution
At the end of the day....

- We have made people’s life better...
  - Out of pain
  - Compliant with school requirements
  - Built a relationship that has potential to change lives....even SAVE lives.
What works....

- Peer Teachers
- Community Health Workers
- Health literacy
- Trusted local agency staff
- Cultural competency
Initiatives to consider

- Advocate for dental exam (& follow-up) at *lifespan milestones*
- Removing *soda pop* from SNAP
- Better integration of foreign trained dentists
- Mid-level dental provider
- Statewide media campaign to provide evidence based oral health info to the public
- Focus on demand first, then supply.
Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics
  - www.aap.org
- Ohio Department of Health
  - Help Me Smile
  - Smile Ohio (varnish program)
- Healthpath Foundation of Ohio
- Local Dental / Dental Hygiene programs
- Community foundations, United Way
You Can Make a Difference…

- Provide oral health assessments.
- Make referrals for dental care.
- Provide oral health education.
- Be the healthcare provider you want for yourself.
Ask, Look! Refer!
Oral Health Isn’t Optional in OHIO!
Field of Dreams: Will they come?