

Dental hygienist will provide a new 'dimension' to center

By Mary Lichtenwalner
Of the Emerald

It has been almost one year since University student Todd Saunders presented a platform in his campaign for ASUO president a push for a dentist at the Student Health Center.

And although he did not win the race, Saunders says he still has kept his word. Earlier this month, the Student Health Center Committee agreed unanimously to develop a program to include a dental hygienist at the health center. Saunders says the program should be available fall term.

Students won't be paying for the program out of their own pockets, however, Saunders says. Services will be offered at a minimal cost, but the construction and addition of the dental facility will be paid for out of the health center's \$400,000 surplus that has accumulated over several years, he says.

"We need to have a surplus every year, but I think \$400,000 is ridiculous," Saunders says.

Saunders attributes the progress of installing the program to the newly adopted student health committee. Last year the committee, composed of students and faculty, replaced the Student Health Advisory Committee.

Saunders, chairman of the committee, reorganized the group to increase students' voices on decisions made about the health

center's services and budget. The health center is supported by student funds.

"It seemed rather odd that students were paying \$2.5 million a year for something they had no control over, only advisory," Saunders says.

Saunders is quick to add that the committee does not suspect wrongdoings at the center, but emphasizes that students should have control. "It's just like an investment — if we invest 100 percent, we should at least have a say in it."

The dental facility would be available for cleaning teeth, check-ups, taking a dental history for the students' medical record, making dental referrals if additional services are needed and providing dental education, oral hygiene and nutritional instruction, Saunders says.

Committee member Donna Lawrence says the program is a positive step.

"The only people who will have to pay for it are those who choose to use it," she says. "It's about half the price of seeing a regular dentist."

Saunders says that dental exams will cost students about \$10. "But personally, I think it should be free," he says. Providing X-rays is another service he says he would like to see.

"I hope that in the next five to six years we'll have a complete dental service," he says. They're designing it with that long-range thought in mind, it will make the conversion easier.

Health Center Medical Administrator Bob Petit says details, such as licensing, still need to be worked out for the program. "But it's a program we're actively pursuing," he says.

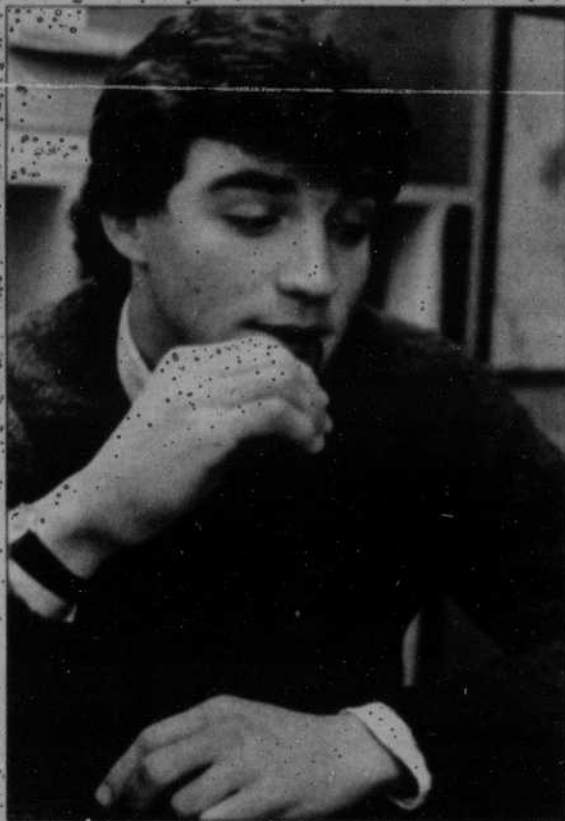
So far, plans indicate that the facility would be located upstairs in the health center, near the women's clinic. Remodeling at the clinic may be done in order to ensure women the necessary confidentiality.

Petit says several local dentists volunteered to advise the health center on planning the facility.

"It's really in the planning stages," Petit says. "The dental hygienist program has apparently been discussed for years, and last spring the health center and the committee looked at the possibility of putting it into the works."

Every year a needs assessment survey is taken by an outside agency, ranking the needs of the students, Saunders says. According to recent surveys, the need for a dental hygienist ranked near the top.

The dental program is an additional attraction for the University, Saunders says. "It adds another dimension to the University, showing that we offer more than just an education — we offer an excellent health service," he says.



Todd Saunders

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