

SignalViewpoints

Dental van grows through ‘word of mouth’

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX

Say “cheese!” For those without resources for dental health, a big smile can be a source of anxiety. In Seaside, there is an option for those without dental insurance or in economic distress. With Medical Teams International and Providence Seaside’s patient navigator, Justin Abbott, the Healthy Smiles program offers free dental care for children and adults.

On the day of my visit, two dental chairs in the van were occupied and patients were scheduled throughout the day.

Through September, in Seaside alone the van has seen 197 patients and provided more than \$112,000 worth of dental care to patients.

In 2017, the van performed more than 1,000 procedures; this year as of Oct. 1, that number stood at 664.

The van averages about eight patient visits a day, Abbott said.

Patients often find out about the van at health fairs like Seaside’s annual “Homeless Connect,” on recommendations from friends, or on a walk-in basis.

Patients must meet the following requirements: a family income less than 200% of the federal poverty line; no private insurance; and no realistic ability to pay for or access urgent dental care — treating symptoms including dental pain, swelling, tooth decay or infection.

Based in Tigard, 12 vans travel to hospitals, churches and rehab facilities throughout the Northwest as far north as Canada and as far south as California.

On-site patients will find a dentist, dental assistant and sometimes a hygienist, dental program coordinator Kristi Nolan said.

Nolan said patients are often in “dire need” of medical treatment, requiring numbing, extractions and antibiotics. Since the van is always moving from place to place, ongoing treatment must be coordinated at the van’s other locations, including Portland.



Kristi Nolan, Dr. Scott Santos and Alyssa Oja inside the Medical Teams International dental van.

R.J. Marx



Providence Healthy Smiles Coordinator Justin Abbott.

Providence Seaside Hospital Foundation

Seaside’s Dr. Scott Santos is one of several local dentists — with Dr. Jon Bletscher of North Coast Dental, Astoria’s Jeremiah Shakespear, and Dr. Bryce Evans of Seaside Dental Clinic — to donate their time and services to the program.

“We’ve been involved with it for about 15 years,” Santos said between dental van patients. “It’s a way to give back a little bit our time, our services to patients that don’t always have the resources or abilities to take care of some of their basic dental needs.”

He said he often sees people who haven’t had dental care “for a long time.”

“We take it on a case-by-case basis,” Santos said. “We see what the situation is, anything from fillings to gum issues, infections. We can’t treat the entire mouth — unfortunately if we had the time we could.”

Volunteering is a great way to help patients, Santos said. “The goal for all of us in the profession is to help people and get people feeling better. Our area happens to be in the mouth.”

Dental assistant Alyssa Oja seconded that. “It definitely makes you feel good to get people out of pain and help them feel better,” she said.

The team envisions a time when the van could visit Seaside more often.

“We’re here every couple of months, four times a year,” Nolan said. “So I think it would be good to have it once a month, for people who have a hard time accessing medical care and dental care, people on Medicare who don’t have dental plans.”

“That’s the reason a lot of people avoid dental care, because

A PATIENT’S TESTIMONIAL

Q: What’s your name?
Drake: Joel Drake — J.D.

Q: Where do you live?
Drake: Seaside.

Q: What does the dental van mean for you?
Drake: It means fixing the old teeth that are breaking down.

Q: Do they give you good care?
Drake: Yeah. They’ve had to pull out a couple (teeth).

Q: Do other people in the community know about it?
Drake: I heard about it a year or two ago. I was just talking to a lady yesterday at Safeway and she was complaining about a cavity in her tooth after eating a candy bar. “I can’t afford to fix that,” she said. I said, “You know, they have a free dental van.” She’ll probably look into that. I think it’s all word of mouth — what a thing to say!

They’re awesome, their service is great. Where else can you get help like that that’s professional? Not around here.

they don’t have the funds or the finances, and insurance is expensive,” she added.

Nolan, who was heading to St. Helens next, said driving the van is like navigating a horse and buggy. “Bouncy! I have to strap everything down.”

With cabinets full of equipment, organization is at top of mind.

“When I first started it was an hour set up an hour teardown,” Nolan said. “Now I can do it in 15 minutes.”

As she travels around the region, she said she finds big rewards in her work.

“Big smiles! It warms their heart,” Nolan said. “It’s very helpful for people. I’m lucky to be able to come out here and help the community.”

For more information, call Providence Seaside at 503-717-7174. For a list of mobile dental clinics throughout the state, visit www.medicalteams.org.

From the front lines of the opioid crisis

While I am very aware there is an opioid crisis, I’d be the first to admit I don’t know squat about the current thinking regarding opiate addiction treatment. The last time I checked, it was all about tough love, incarceration, and success narrowly defined by a person giving up all use.

So I was eager to attend the 2019 Columbia Pacific Opioid and Substance Abuse Summit held last week at the convention center. The vision of the summit was to develop a trauma-informed network for all substance use disorders, ensuring timely and equitable access, as well as reducing stigma. The organizers also hoped to promote cross-organizational coordination with a community already experienced in working towards long-term recovery support.

The summit was huge. The Necanicum Room was packed. Attendees and sponsors from OHSU, Legacy Health, the Rinehart Clinic and Pharmacy, Columbia Memorial Hospital, Adventist Health, Providence Seaside Hospital, Tillamook Family Counseling, Tides of Change, Helping Hands and other support communities were there, as well as a slew of medical personnel, treatment court coordinators, firefighters, paramedics, and social workers.

After a welcome and introduction given by Dr. Safina Koreishi, medical director for Columbia Pacific CCO, and a moving presentation by Kerry Strickland, chair and founder of Jordan’s Hope for Recovery, the audience listened in rapt attention to the recovery story of Dr. Ana Hilde, a



Dr. Ana Hilde is a child and adolescent psychiatrist with OHSU; Dr. Safina Koreishi is medical director with Columbia Pacific CCO. Both women spoke at the 2019 Columbia Pacific Opioid and Substance Use Summit.

Eve Marx

child and adolescent psychiatrist with OHSU. Dr. Hilde told the shocking story of her own addiction to heroin while she was in medical school.

A big takeaway from Dr. Hilde’s story is that people do relapse. The road to recovery isn’t easy. There will be setbacks.

At a breakout session introducing and explaining “CRAFT,” which stands for Community Reinforcement and Family Training given by Cordelia Kraus, a psychotherapist with Vital Space LLC, I learned expecting complete abstinence from opioid use may be setting the bar too high. Reducing use over the long run may actually be enough. Kraus said that 9.4 percent of Oregonians struggle with substance abuse, and for every person who struggles, four of their friends, family members or co-workers are being impacted. The goal of CRAFT training is motivating

families to change their approach how they respond to their addict loved ones. Positive phrasing, offering understanding statements, and being specific in praise when something goes right or is well done is more effective than tough love.

At a seminar on chronic pain called, “Why Do People Use Drugs?” Dr. David Labby, a health strategy advisor with Health Share of Oregon, said there is a fine line between medically treating a patient in pain and making them dangerously numb. Childhood emotional abuse is a significant factor why people use, as is depression. I learned doctors are prescribing Benzodiazepines, commonly called “benzos,” a class of psychoactive drugs, more than ever, and the strength of these narcotics has increased precipitously. Dr. Labby remarked that increased access to medical care has in fact influenced how many people use.

A CONSTANT STRUGGLE

9.4 percent of Oregonians struggle with substance abuse, and for every person who struggles, four of their friends, family members or co-workers are being impacted.

I learned women are closing the gender gap for alcohol abuse, and scary as the opioid crisis is, the alcohol problem is even bigger.

At a seminar led by Julianne M. Heuer, treatment court coordinator for Columbia County state courts, I learned poverty is the primary component as to who winds up in drug court. In Columbia County, coordinated treatment plans are available for nonviolent offenders who are substance abusers. Referrals to drug court come from probation officers, law enforcement, sometimes from the jails themselves. There’s a one-year program and an 18-month program. The longer you stay in the program, the better the outcome. The intention of drug court is not just to get non-violent offenders off drugs, but also to reunite parents with their children.

I’m sorry I ran out of energy to attend the seminars on management of methamphetamine use; how to talk to adolescents about drugs; and housing support for people in recovery, which I think is an urgent and important issue.

The main takeaway for me of the day was learning that when it comes to treating substance abuse, progress, not perfection, is the goal.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Monday, Oct. 28
Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Tuesday, Oct. 29
Seaside Planning Commission, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Wednesday, Oct. 30
6:30 p.m., Gearhart Planning Commission and City Council, joint work session, 698 Pacific Way.

Tuesday, Nov. 5
Community Center Commission meeting, 10:30 a.m., Bob Chisholm Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside.

Seaside Library Board, 4:30 p.m., Seaside Public Library, 1131 Broadway.

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, board workshop, Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside.

Wednesday, Nov. 6
Seaside Improvement Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.

Thursday, Nov. 7
Seaside Parks Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Monday, Nov. 11
Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Thursday, Nov. 14
Seaside Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., Convention Center, 415 First Ave.

Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.

Tuesday, Nov. 19
Seaside School District Board of Directors, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin, Seaside.

Seaside Planning Commission, 7 p.m., work session, City Hall, 989 Broadway.



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