

Florida Dentistry Focusing on Care for Elders

Accommodating the oral health care needs of the estimated 76 million Baby Boomers who are retiring in 2008 is absolutely essential.

“By 2030, one out of every five Americans will be older than 65,” Mary Kaplan, MSW, from the University of South Florida School of Aging Studies said. “With Florida ranking among the top three states with the highest percentages of elderly, the state must rise to the challenge to assist elders with their health care needs to maintain a good quality of life through the senior years.”

As a result of population shifts, Donna Jacobi, MD, CMD, from the Florida State University Pensacola Regional Medical School campus has taken an in-depth look at oral health practices in long-term care facilities.

“The laws requiring oral health care in nursing homes contrast to what is actually taking place to provide meaningful oral health care to this population,” Dr. Jacobi said.

“I recently saw a nursing home patient who had not taken out her upper removable partial denture for more than six months,” FDA President Dr. **Nolan W. Allen** said. “To prevent these occurrences, we have to start with training caregivers, relatives, spouses, nurses and the residents themselves.

“Again, it is all about education and prevention. However, in addition to these efforts, we need to go to the patient to provide care – a lot of these individuals are immobile and it is the only way to ensure their health care needs are met. We must also continue to emphasize the good oral health-good systemic health connection.”

In addition, the FDA’s *Project: Dentists Care* (PDC) is working hard to focus as much attention on seniors as is currently placed on children. PDC programs and associate member organizations are intensifying outreach to Florida’s needy seniors with pro bono and reduced-fee dental care. Many of their efforts are funded with grants from the Florida



FDA President Dr. Nolan W. Allen provides dental care for one of his senior patients.

Dental Health Foundation (FDHF), the charitable organization of the FDA.

“Under a recently approved grant request, approximately 290 of the neediest seniors are projected to receive care through an FDHF grant – that’s an average of \$130 worth of dental care each,” PDC Grants Review Committee Chairperson Dr. **Robert Payne** said.

The FDHF grant will provide underserved senior patients with exams, antibiotics therapy, dental cleanings, extractions, dentures, bus passes, toothbrushes, oral care instruction and educational material.

For more information about dental care for seniors, visit www.floridadental.org.

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