



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 07-12-11

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Health department community-based dental clinic expansion moving forward

St. Johns- The Community-Based Dental Center, located inside the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) in St. Johns, has been providing quality dental care to Medicaid-eligible adults residing in Clinton and Gratiot counties since April 2007.

Due to the generous support from several community partners in Clinton and Gratiot counties, the health department is pleased to announce that an expansion of the clinic will begin this month and should be completed by September 1, 2011. The expansion will give even more Medicaid-eligible residents a reason to smile. Community partners that provided financial support for the project include:

- Capital Area Community Services
- Capital Area United Way
- Gratiot County Community Foundation
- Gratiot County Untied Way
- Koenigsknecht Family Dentistry
- St. Johns Rotary
- Sparrow Clinton Hospital

Prior to the clinic's opening in 2007, essentially all Medicaid-eligible adults residing in the two counties had tremendous difficulty accessing dental services. At that time, very few dentists were accepting adult patients on Medicaid. Patients had to either travel a great distance for treatment, which was often an issue, or were forced to visit their local emergency room.

While health department officials knew there was a definite need for the clinic, they quickly realized just how great that need was as staff began treating patients. It became quite clear that the three chair clinic, which was open two days a week, would need to be expanded at some point; both in size and in hours of operation.

MMDHD began working over a year and a half ago to secure necessary community funding to expand the clinic from its current configuration of three dental chairs operating two days per week to five chairs operating five days per week. "It is exciting to have the project officially underway," said Kimberly Singh, MMDHD Health Officer. "We are pleased that the expansion will increase capacity from 1,060 dental visits annually to 6,750 visits. This will improve access to dental services significantly."

In addition, MMDHD is pleased to announce that the clinic will now be run in partnership with Michigan Community Dental Clinics, Inc. (MCDC). Michigan Community Dental Clinics, Inc. operates seventeen public dental clinics across Michigan, one of which is MMDHD's

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former Stanton Dental Care Center, now the Montcalm Area Dental Clinic located in Sidney. MCDC has a proven track record of providing dental services to low-income, uninsured, and at-risk populations in areas that have a shortage of dental providers.

The Montcalm Area Dental Center is now thriving under MCDC's direction and is serving more clients than ever before. The health department has every reason to believe MCDC would have the same positive effect on the Community-Based Dental Clinic in St. Johns.

“The expansion will increase the number of residents served from 470 to approximately 3,000 annually,” continued Singh. “It will also result in a clinic that has enhanced long-term financial viability, thus making it less dependent on financial support from the community that has been required the first three years of operation.”

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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