Restoring Smiles: Public Health Department Dental Clinic to open Ysleta site

Bruce A. Parsons

Maria rarely laughs. To other six year olds in Ysleta, life is funny, smile for smile. But not for Maria. Her mouth hurts; several teeth decayed by bad diet and poor oral care.

Brushing Maria’s teeth at bedtime is painful beyond purpose. A visit to a dentist is a luxury the family can ill afford. To Maria’s mother the situation is hopeless.

But hope and help is on its way for Maria and hundreds of low income Ysleta children.

The Rawlings Pediatric Dental Clinic, a City of El Paso Department of Public Health program, will soon expand services to the Lower Valley through a satellite clinic at its Ysleta office. Currently, immunizations and nutrition (WIC) services are provided at Ysleta. Dental services at the facility, located at 110 Candelaria Street, will be available Tuesday and Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The dental program has served the El Paso community for over thirty (30) years, targeting children from families with limited resources and limited access to dental care. Despite increased use of dental sealants and water fluoridation, preventable oral diseases still afflict many children and adults, impacting their self-image and quality of life as well as compromising their health and well-being.

Within the El Paso community, many families with lower income and education levels have problems getting private dental care. A significant number of patients see a dentist for the first time at the Rawlings Clinic. Many of them arrive with severe and untreated tooth decay. The problem is more than aesthetic. Poor oral health can lead to cardiovascular and other diseases.

The health department dental program targets children from 6 months to 21 years of age providing sealants, restorations, extractions, dental hygiene, root canals, pulpotomies, and other preventive care.

Dr. Gabriela Rey, one of three newly recruited public health dentists, will be in charge of providing services at the Ysleta location. Dr. Rey is excited about the clinic expansion, “There are so many children who need our services. The Ysleta clinic will restore smiles to their faces.”

The Rawlings Pediatric Clinic operates in Central El Paso at 3301 Pera Street where hundreds of eligible children and adolescents who reside in the City and County of El Paso receive care. In addition, through two fully equipped dental mobile units, the program provides services to children who reside in isolated areas of the county including Horizon City, San Elizario, Fabens, Canutillo and others.

Outreach to underserved children in isolated communities is made possible through a close partnership with local school districts that jointly coordinate dental care and prevention education at schools in these communities. In addition, the dental program works in collaboration with the El Paso County Juvenile Probation program to serve adolescents in their program.

Due to shortage of dental professionals in the El Paso area, the dental program has operated with limited dentist coverage for the last two years. In 2009, approximately 5,200 children and adolescents received care through our program. However, through the recent recuitment of three (3) additional Dentists, Dr. Kelley Brooks, Senior Public Health Dentist and Drs. Gabriela Rey and Natalya Mendez, access to dental care and education is expected to triple, thus narrowing the gap in dental care access for underserved and unserved communities.

For information on dental services or for an appointment, please call 313-8000.

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