

Unique Dental Program Ensures Illinois Children With Special Needs Have Access to Quality Dental Care

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Collaboration is the Only Downstate Program to Treat Children Regardless of Financial Limitations

ALTON - Seven-year-old Londen of Belleville, Ill. faced a number of dental issues, including tooth abscesses, that caused the little girl significant pain. Because her fear and anxiety made it difficult for her to sit still in the dentist's chair, treatment under sedation was the only option to provide the relief she needed. However, finding someone to perform the work was difficult.

Londen was eventually referred by her dentist to the [Special Needs Dental Program](#) at Touchette Regional Hospital. After she was sedated, a pediatric dentist performed a year's worth of dental work - including caps, fillings and extractions - in less than two hours, giving Londen the healthy smile she deserved.

"Not only does she no longer have abscesses, she has no other dental problems," said her grandmother, Tina Hughes. "It has meant a big difference in her life. We're focused on keeping her teeth healthy."

A unique partnership in Southern Illinois is ensuring that no child - regardless of disability or financial limitations - is denied high-quality, compassionate dental care. The Special Needs Dental Program, a collaboration between the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU/SDM), Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation (SIHF) and Touchette Regional Hospital, provides an affordable dental care option for families with no place else to turn.

The program was funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation to expand current services to treat more children in 2015 and beyond. Since 2006, Dr. Kenneth Rawson, pediatric dentist at Touchette and section head of pediatric dentistry at SIU/SDM, has provided dental care and surgery at the hospital. With the grant, Touchette has opened a second operating room for sedation, and SIU/SDM has added Dr. Andrea Bell, a dental anesthesiologist, to meet the growing demand for service.

The Program is focused on serving children who have difficulty sitting still at the dentist because of anxiety or age as well as those with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, ADHD and other neurological disorders, and genetic syndromes. It is the only program in Illinois outside Chicago that offers dental anesthesia for children on Medicaid.

Treating the whole child

With a team of dentists, dental surgeons and anesthesiologists - all trained in serving children with special needs - the Special Needs Dental Program delivers preventative and restorative care under minimal to deep sedation or general anesthesia. From the treatment of cavities to tooth extractions, each treatment plan is customized to the patient's physical, mental and emotional needs.

"For children with special needs, protecting their dental health can be a challenge," remarked Dr. Rawson. "Medications and medical conditions can damage the enamel of their teeth while development disabilities or anxiety about the dentist can make regular dental hygiene difficult."

Through the Program, children are first seen by a SIHF dentist for an initial evaluation. In 20 percent of cases, a SIHF dentist can treat issues in the office without any sedation.

Children with more serious conditions that require some level of sedation will be referred to the dental clinic at SIU/SDM in Alton, Ill. or undergo treatment with full anesthesia at Touchette.

In addition to treatment, the Program is focused on training the next generation of pediatric dentists, bringing students into the operating room to gain direct experience in treating children with special needs and administering general anesthesia. The partners and students are also working side-by-side to train public health departments across Southern Illinois to instruct parents how to help their children practice good oral health habits.

Parents and dentists may call the Program at 618-332-2740, ext. 109 to develop a treatment plan for their child. For more information, visit www.sihf.org/special-needs-dentistry.

About Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation: SIHF operates a network of 30 health centers across nine counties with more than 150 medical providers who deliver comprehensive family and adult services including: Pediatrics, Obstetrics, Primary Care, Dental Services, Behavioral Health and extensive community outreach programs. As one of the largest Federally Qualified Health Center networks in the country, SIHF is devoted to leading individuals and communities to their healthiest lifestyle regardless of their ability to pay. For more information, visit www.sihf.org.

About Touchette Regional Hospital: Touchette Regional Hospital has proudly served the Metro East communities of Alorton, Cahokia, Centreville, East St. Louis, and Washington Park. Touchette offers high-quality Cardiopulmonary, Laboratory, Radiology, Physical Therapy, Obstetrical Services, 24-hour Emergency Department, Behavior Health, Medical/Surgical, Intensive Care, and Surgical Services all provided with renowned compassion and care from our staff and providers. For more information, visit www.touchette.org.

School of Dental Medicine: School of Dental Medicine students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.

About Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation: Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation was formed in December 2002 through an action of then Attorney General

Jim Ryan and an Illinois insurance carrier. This action and a settlement of approximately \$125 million established the only private foundation focused on the health needs of children in Illinois. The mission of the foundation is to cultivate, support, and promote initiatives that improve the health and wellness of children in Illinois.