



# Bringing Smiles to Cecil County

BY GWEN NEWMAN

**A** new partnership between Union Hospital and the University of Maryland Dental School gives some Cecil County residents a big reason to smile.

A 2007 study revealed that more than one-third of the children in the rural northeastern reaches of Maryland had untreated tooth decay, well surpassing the national average of 23 percent. Meanwhile, nurses in Elkton reported that as many as 200 schoolchildren in Cecil County suffered pain from toothaches at any given time.

“There was worry about the long-term consequences,” says Norman Tinanoff, DDS, MS, chair of the Dental School’s Department of Health Promotion and Policy. “It’s not nice to suffer dental pain,” he says, “and it’s unpleasant to have constant chronic pain. These students don’t function as well

in school, and if their dental problems are left untreated, they can lead to very severe problems.”

This proved all too true in February 2007 when Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old from Prince George’s County, died from an untreated abscess. A lack of insurance and a shortage of dentists accepting Medicaid were blamed.

Access to dental care is worst in rural areas, Tinanoff says. Less than a year after Driver’s death, the Dental School and Union Hospital announced their partnership in Cecil County, just south of Pennsylvania and west of Delaware. The initiative is an addition to the already extensive outreach program provided by the Dental School, Maryland’s largest provider of oral health care to underserved populations.

The agreement with Union Hospital calls for the Dental School to operate a 26-chair oral health care suite, with space

*Dental School students and staff will offer the same exceptional care at the new site.*

for up to 100 daily pediatric and adult dental visits, in the hospital’s new Principio Health Center, a 24,000-square-foot, \$15 million outpatient health care system under construction in Perryville.

The University of Maryland is one of eight dental schools nationwide awarded \$200,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to improve the diversity of its student body or to increase access to dental care in underserved areas through community-based education for dental students. Carroll-Ann Trotman, BDS, MA, MS, associate dean for academic affairs at the Dental School and the School’s principal investigator on the award, is excited by what the partnership in Cecil County means for untreated patients, and by what it means for her students.

“One of the things we’d like to do is to expose students to a real-world, private practice experience,” Trotman says. “They will provide the same level of exceptional state-of-the-art dental care to their patients that the Dental School is known for. In that private practice model, they will work efficiently and provide the quality of care that is provided at the Dental School. The Robert Wood Johnson grant will enhance our students’ service learning experiences, particularly in underserved communities.”

Union Hospital officials are enthused as well. “This partnership emphasizes the growth in our community and our responsiveness to that growth,” says Kathryn McKinney, a hospital spokeswoman. “We’re very excited that we’re going to be able to offer patients in the Perryville-Port Deposit area care that is closer to home. The county has been growing and the need for more medical services is evident.”

The gap in care in Cecil County has been attributed both to the region’s geographic distance from dental professionals and to a shortage of local dentists who accept Medicaid. At one point, just one dentist was serving the area.

Tinanoff says the partnership’s initial goal is to identify children, through the school system, who suffer the greatest pain and have the most immediate needs. It may take a year to cycle students through the program, but he says treatment will be available to more children at an earlier stage than

it is now. That should yield benefits both medically and academically.

“This is one example of how the Dental School is reaching out to the community, even though there are significant risks and expenses,” says Tinanoff. “Other dental schools have outreach clinics, but I do not think any are at the scope of this project.”

Though the program was conceived to help meet dental care needs within the pediatric population, the vision soon grew to include adults. “Our concern,” says Tinanoff, “is to provide treatment to those in need and without access to care.”

Trotman says the program calls for dental students to have two three-week rotations instead of one. “For all students, one of those rotations must be at Cecil County,” she says.

Dental students there will reside in a carriage house in Port Deposit, Md., located at the Donaldson Brown Estate, which is owned by the University of Maryland.

Another regional partnership the Dental School initiated in 2008 is with Cecil College to educate dental hygienists. The Dental School’s online curriculum will be delivered at a distance-learning site at the college, and clinical teaching will take place at Union Hospital.

“It’s a project of partnerships,” says Tinanoff, “and that’s really been forging the way between Union Hospital, the University of Maryland Dental School, Cecil College, and the Cecil County Health Department.”

“We are excited about bringing much-needed dental care to an underserved area of Cecil County,” says Christian S. Stohler, DMD, DrMedDent, dean of the Dental School, which is supplementing the Robert Wood Johnson grant with another \$100,000 toward this Cecil County commitment. “The equipment, the technology, and the people we are bringing to the facility all represent the highest caliber of service we can offer to our patients.”

Kenneth Lewis, MD, president and CEO of Union Hospital, says the oral health care suite will help the hospital’s new outpatient center respond to regional growth and the demand for quality health care services.

“This project allows Union Hospital to improve our patients’ experience by bringing comprehensive care closer to where they live,” Lewis says.