

## **Elder Smiles – Program Overview**

This is a program where services are delivered at the Adult Care Facility. The program will begin in nursing homes, and then extend to assisted living facilities, home plus, and adult daycares. Eventually the service may be taken in to Senior Centers, Senior High Rises, and other similar locations. Registered Dental Hygienists with an Extended Care Permit II (ECP), under the supervision of a sponsoring dentist, will provide teeth cleanings and dental assessments to elderly residents who live in long-term care facilities. This program provides access to dental care for those without the physical or financial means to visit a regular dental office. The project will provide preventive services but also will identify oral health problems, make appropriate referrals and provide oral hygiene education to residents, families, and staff.

Two long-term care facilities will serve as project pilot sites under the grant and will include other facilities as soon as possible. Each facility will provide a room to be used by the dental hygienist. Facility social workers and nursing staff will support the program by providing the hygienist with pertinent health information and assisting patients with the process. The facilities will promote the program to the residents and families, secure consent, and schedule patients. Special efforts will be made to educate families about the importance of oral health to reduce other health risks even in those patients with little or no teeth. The long-term care facility staff will also be educated to provide better oral care to their residents on a daily basis. In-kind contributions (space, facility staff time, etc) from the long-term care facilities are estimated to be over \$30,000 for the project in the first year. Additionally, the program demonstrates how the portable clinic enhances the lives of their patients, provides prompt needed dental services, and reduces emergency dental visits.

This grant provides for the purchase of equipment and supplies to create the Elder Smiles program. An ECP II Registered Hygienist will begin to offer services in the pilot long-term care facilities when the equipment is in place. On-site teeth cleanings and oral health exams will be provided twice a year to residents. Each patient will also receive an annual fluoride varnish. The fluoride varnish is extremely beneficial since good daily brushing is often difficult for the elderly. The hygienist's sponsoring dentist will review the patient records monthly. Appropriate referrals to the patients' regular dentists for infections, cavities, extractions, etc will be made by the hygienist.

The Elder Smiles program has been structured to be self-supporting through fees for service. This is possible since the grant covers the initial start up costs for equipment and supplies. Operating revenue will cover the hygienist's and sponsoring dentist's salaries and consumable dental supplies. Each nursing home will be responsible to collect payment from their residents. The Health Department will bill the long-term care facility for the service and will pay the hygienist/dentist fees. In the programs first year, the plan is to serve around 600

elderly adults by providing teeth cleanings and oral exams who otherwise would not receive dental services. These numbers will increase in subsequent years as the program expands throughout the county.

The Elder Smiles program anticipates partnering with HSA in the future to bring the portable dental program to Senior Centers where they provide many other services for Seniors. HSA reports their outreach programs offered 1200 services to the Senior population last year. Based on the current trends of oral health care among the 60 plus age group, many of the 1200 clients HSA currently serves could greatly benefit from an on-site oral health program.

Many positive outcomes for the elderly community are expected as a result of the establishment of the Elder Smiles program in Johnson County. Elderly residents in long-term care will have increased access to dental hygiene services resulting in lower rates of new oral disease and tooth loss. The portable oral health clinic provides flexibility and convenience. Patients will experience less pain related to dental problems and will be referred for dental work before infections or other problems escalate. They will maintain or improve their nutritional status and avoid weight loss which translates to better overall health and decreased expense for healthcare. Research has shown that improving an elderly persons oral health not only improves their physical health but also increase their mental health as well.

Outcomes will be measured through various dental statistics maintained by the program including patient visits, existence of a family dentist, and numbers of referrals made. Program staff will document the numbers of cavities & broken teeth, and cases of gingivitis and periodontal disease. These measures will show that over time, on-site access to dental services for the elderly in long-term care facilities will result in improved oral health and general well being. These statistics will be used to increase community awareness and to further market the program for expansion in future years.

Patients and/or their caregivers will be given annual surveys to monitor the quality and satisfaction of patient care. Additionally, an Advisory Committee consisting of long-term care facility representatives, dental school representatives, professional staff, state level representatives, participating hygienists, and dentists will meet at least twice a year to discuss operations and make improvements.