



EXPAND

ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE



► Joseph F. Morales, D.D.S. (wearing tie), chairman of the Department of Dental Medicine, is proud of the dental medicine residency program team (from left): Naida Henríquez, D.M.D., Ali Nassiri, D.M.D., Rosa Martínez, D.D.S., Janet Bozzone, D.M.D., M.P.H., Raha Iraj, D.D.S., M.P.H., Ahmed Boraey, D.M.D., Paulette Porteous Cole, D.D.S., and Kyungsuk "Peter" Yoo, D.M.D. Not pictured is Mayank Pahwa, D.M.D.

BY JEN USCHER

For more than 30 years, the Open Door Family Medical Centers have been offering medical and dental care on a sliding-fee scale to low-income and uninsured residents of Westchester County, N.Y. Beginning in the summer of 2012, Open Door's Port Chester location, in collaboration with Phelps Memorial Hospital in Sleepy Hollow, became a new clinical training site for New York Medical College's general dental practice residency. With four dental residents now assigned to work at Phelps/Open Door, the community health center can offer a wider range of dental procedures than in the past. And the residents are learning how dentists can play a key role as part of a comprehensive primary health care team.

"We're introducing young dentists to the environment of a patient-centered medical home," says Joseph F. Morales, D.D.S., professor and chairman of the Department of Dental Medicine at the College. "They'll leave not only with first-rate dental skills, but also with a mindset of providing affordable dentistry in a place where people can get an annual physical, too."

Trainees assigned to the Phelps/Open Door site spend part of their one-year residency in the hospital, where they do rotations in anesthesiology, medicine and emergency medicine, perform procedures in the operating room and cover dentistry on-call for the emergency room. The program recently expanded with the addition of the new sites and now accepts a total of ten, up from six, residents for each academic year. Three residents are also assigned to Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan and three are placed at Westchester Medical Center (WMC) in Valhalla.

The idea for expanding the program arose from discussions between Richard McCarrick, M.D., vice dean for graduate medical education and affiliations at the College, and Keith Safian and Lindsay Farrell, top executives at Phelps and Open Door, respectively. The three institutions had successfully collaborated in developing a new family medicine residency program in 2011, and wanted to expand the range of clinical services and educational opportunities they could offer jointly. All agreed that a dental residency would complement the family medicine residency program. Following a concerted—and successful—joint effort to receive accreditation from the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation, the first group of residents started training at Phelps/Open Door mere months after the decision to incorporate those sites into the residency.

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ING

IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH

All of the dental residency's training sites share a commitment to providing dental care to underserved communities. At Metropolitan, for example, the dental clinic is one of the few providers of affordable dental services and certain types of specialty care in East Harlem. Affordable dental care is also hard to find in Westchester County, in spite of its reputation as one of the wealthiest counties in the state. Open Door, which has four locations in Westchester and one in Putnam County, fills an important niche in serving more than 14,000 dental patients each year. More than 93 percent of those patients are earning incomes of less than \$46,100 for a family of four.

"Part of our goal in partnering with a community health center is to introduce residents to public health dentistry, a career path they might not have learned much about in dental school," says Dr. Morales. While most dentists go into private practice or follow an academic career path, those who choose public health dentistry often work in places where access to dental care is a problem—for example, at a family health center in a rural area or on an Indian reservation. Open Door, which received the highest level of recognition as a patient-centered medical home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, is a stellar example of a health center that serves both the community and the people who train there.

"It's very attractive to the residents that Open Door is almost like one-stop health shopping," says Rosa Martinez, D.D.S., assistant professor of dental medicine, general dental practice residency program director, and director of service at WMC. "Open Door has integrated electronic dental and medical records systems. If a resident needs to find out about a patient's systemic health issue, they can look at the electronic health record or walk across the hall and ask a physician about it," she says.

COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING

Whether they're assigned to Metropolitan, WMC, or Phelps/Open Door, residents train in both outpatient and inpatient settings. During their hospital-based



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rotations, they interact with physicians in the emergency room, operating room, the anesthesiology department, the medicine service and other departments. These experiences help prepare them to treat adult and pediatric patients with diseases or injuries that can affect the oral and maxillofacial complex.

“When they participate in the medicine rotation at Phelps, for instance, they learn about the relationship between oral and systemic diseases. They see how diabetes, hypertension, respiratory problems, and renal disease can have an effect on oral health,” explains Dr. Martinez.

Since the three training sites are geographically spread out, residents attend lectures, seminars, grand rounds and other presentations about three times per week via interactive videoconference. Using this technology, NYMC faculty members often deliver their lectures remotely from home or office, as do guest speakers—including many NYMC alumni—from across the country.

At Open Door’s Port Chester location, when patients need more sophisticated dental procedures, the staff doesn’t have to refer them as often to other facilities. Janet Bozzone, D.M.D., M.P.H., director

of dentistry at Open Door Family Medical Centers and site director for NYMC’s general dental practice residency program at Open Door, says that with the addition of the dental residents, the Port Chester site can now offer enhanced dental services, such as root canal therapy, crowns, bridges, and advanced oral and periodontal surgery. “All of our attending faculty dentists have completed residency programs or advanced training themselves, and they welcome the opportunity to train the next generation of dental practitioners. The residents have the benefit of learning from a variety of experienced dentists with diverse skill sets.”

NO PAIN, PATIENTS’ GAIN

Ali Nassiri, D.M.D., a resident at Phelps/Open Door, who graduated from the Kornberg School of Dentistry at Temple University, says the patients he sees are grateful that more procedures can be done in-house at the Port Chester location. “A lot of our patients are in pain and if you can [relieve their] pain by performing a root canal or an extraction, you can really help them,” he says.

Another resident, Ahmed Boraey, D.M.D., appreciates being able to perform a wide range of procedures, including restoring

dental implants, providing invisible braces and performing oral and periodontal surgeries. “I’ve done about 40 root canals so far, which has been a very good experience,” says Dr. Boraey, who graduated from UMDNJ-New Jersey Dental School.

In the future, Dr. Morales and his team are hoping to expand the residency program further to include Phelps’ Sleepy Hollow location of the Open Door Family Medical Centers system, and to accept an additional four residents, bringing the total to fourteen.

Dr. Morales is glad to see more young practitioners gaining exposure to public health dentistry as the result of their residency at Phelps/Open Door. “They leave here with the ability to offer affordable care to people who otherwise wouldn’t have access to it. And they are very appreciative. At Open Door, we see a lot of children with caries—one of the most prevalent childhood diseases in this country—who would otherwise go untreated,” he says. “It’s professionally rewarding to be able to help people who need it most, in a way that goes beyond monetary rewards.” ■