

Buffalo's new non-profit dental clinic to offer services to central MN region

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ENTERPRISE DISPATCH

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Editor

Community Dental Care (CDC), a non-profit dental provider, intends to open a clinic in Buffalo this summer.

The clinic is the result of the hard work of many Wright County personnel and residents in particular.

The clinic will be located in the new Wright County Government Center at 3650 Brad-dock Ave. NE, in Buffalo.

Determining the problems

Dr. Jennifer Mader has worked with the Wright County Public Health Department in several capacities for decades and said the need for dental services for uninsured and under-insured people had been a long-standing problem.

The Wright County Public Health Task Force reported that Minnesota ranks 47th out of 50 in the nation for Medicaid reimbursement rates for children and adults needing dental care.

It also reported that the emergency departments at Buffalo Hospital and CentraCare Health - Monticello continue to see increases in people visiting with routine oral care problems - the entities respectively saw 1,028 and 995 patients with a dental diagnosis in 2016-2019.

The topic was frequently discussed in county task force meetings, including citizens from across Wright County.

"These would often be the most depressing," Mader said, "because people would share their community clients and personal experiences in getting poor follow-up and basic dental care unless there was a local dentist who would make special exceptions."

Traveling clinics were occasionally visited, but they tended to provide dental ser-

vices for children only.

"By far, the most challenging service found was for citizens with disabilities and adults or seniors," Mader said.

In spring 2017, nursing students from St. Cloud State University were assigned a project - to survey local dentists regarding the mixture of clients and dental care coverage for medical assistance (MA) clients.

A presentation of survey findings was presented that November. Survey results indicated that approximately half of the respondents accepted some MA. Less than one-quarter were accepting new MA patients; however, nearly all respondents were accepting new dental clients who had insurance.

Respondents reported the main complications with MA were inadequate funding or compensation; or trouble interpreting the requirements for covering MA. Respondents also said they needed enough funding to cover the costs of staff and supplies to consider accepting MA patients.

Bring on the Dental task force

As a result of the survey, several people formed a Dental Task Force in January 2018. The group has met monthly since and has grown to include many involved entities, such as CentraCare, Allina Health, Buffalo; City of Delano, Buffalo Family Dentistry, Delta Dental, UCare, Health Partners, BlueCross BlueShield, Head Start, and several Wright County entities.

The Dental Task Force determined there were no available resources to invite to Wright County that would meet the needs of all who were unable to access dental care.

The group then began looking into non-profit dental clinics. At one of the meetings, Mader Google searched

"community dental clinics" to learn how they were typically established.

She then attended an open house at a Community Dental Care (CDC) facility in Maplewood.

Determined, she then met with CDC's CEO and Director of Development and shared the challenges facing the under-served in the Wright County area.

"Within a week, WCPH (Wright County Public Health) and CDC had begun talking," Mader said.

Location, location, location

A location search began. "One of our sub-committee members was a county commissioner, and at one of their meetings, it was reported that a division previously committed to renting space in the new building (the new Wright County Government Center) had found other options to use and would no longer be able to rent the space," Mader said.

Negotiations took place, and CDC committed to renting the space before construction, allowing the space to be specifically designed for a dental clinic.

Funding was still needed. "Two Wright County legislators found the promise in this clinic and sponsored bond funding of \$1.4 million for the clinic," Mader said. The caveat? The funds would not be made available until matching funds were found.

That didn't remain a problem for long. "CDC, with all of their experience and positive reputation, was able to acquire these resources," Mader said.

The Buffalo CDC facility has been prepped with in-floor plumbing and electrical connections. The construction phase will begin soon.

Once completed, the 6,200 square-foot dental clinic will provide comprehensive dental

care to all people, including those enrolled in public programs.

Buffalo's CDC will have 12 operatories and, once fully staffed, will employ four dentists, four hygienists, eight dental assistants, three scheduling/treatment coordinators, one sterilizer, and a manager.

Services for all

Buffalo's CDC will offer services to the entire central Minnesota region, including residents of Wright, Stearns, Sherburne, Carver, Benton, McLeod, and Meeker counties.

It will function as what CDC calls a "dental home" by offering comprehensive dental care and treatment for emergencies.

Medical Assistance (MA), MinnesotaCare, and private insurance will be accepted. CDC also offers self-pay, a sliding fee scale, and Care Credit.

Satisfied smiles are ahead

Mader said she has been thrilled to watch the project go from just a dream to a reality - and feels good about the partnership with CDC.

"They are used to working with state and federally supported insurance and have received awards and gratitude from the state for how they conduct their business," she said. "They also have established wide-ranging education to the communities they join, including working with schools and training programs for dental professionals."

She knows dental care will soon be available close to home for people who need it the most.

"Having this non-profit dental clinic with so much experience meet with us to help meet the same goals for our area has just been like a dream come true," she said.