



Issues of Interest

(preliminary evaluation results)
September 2005

The Miles For Smiles mobile dental clinic was launched in November 2003. The clinic, managed by Penobscot Community Health Center in Bangor, ME and substantially funded by Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Maine, has now provided care to about 6,000 children in western, northern and eastern Maine. A preliminary survey of about 900 program participants has produced the following findings:

General

- Average age of first-time visitors is 9 years, 4 months
- 26% of patients surveyed state that their visit to the mobile dental center was the first-ever for their child
- 61% of children had an oral health care visit in the last 12 months – this is tempered by the observation that 9/10 repeat MFS patients have had care in the last year compared to 4/10 first-time visitors

Barriers to Oral Health Care

Respondents to the questionnaire identified the barriers to oral health care: 61% report the lack of providers who accept MaineCare, 38% lack of dental insurance, 17% of respondents felt their child was too young or saw no need for oral care, 3% do not like dentists and 10% other.

Reasons for Visiting Miles for Smiles

- Each respondent was asked to identify the reason for making an appointment with Miles For Smiles: Nearly 3/4ths (73%) were seeking routine care, 15% reported tooth/mouth/gum pain, 14% had a problem with existing dental work, 6% needed extraction(s) and 11% reported a variety of other reasons.
- Parents were asked about their child's oral health history and reported: 8% had a child who missed school due to tooth pain, 5% had visited a hospital or Emergency Department for tooth pain and 9% had previously seen a doctor for tooth pain.

Education

It is clear that parents feel as strongly as oral health providers about the importance of education. A statistically significant proportion of respondents (95%) felt that education by the dental hygienist was "very important" to the overall oral health of their child, with the remaining 5% noting education as "somewhat important."

Sources of Information about the Program

Details about the Miles For Smiles program have been shared through a variety of venues: 46% respondents initially heard of the program through word-of-mouth, 25% from their medical provider, 15% from the child's school, 11% saw the mobile dental center parked at local site, 9% read about the service in the newspaper and 6% saw items on television (remaining 20% through multiple other sources).

Quality of Care

It was important to note that respondents were evenly split on their perception of the quality of care. Half reported that oral health care provided on the mobile dental center was better than other providers and the second half felt the care was the same as that provided in a traditional office setting. In addition, 99% stated that they would likely bring their child back for follow-up visits.

Finally, 90% of respondents reported that the oral health care received on the mobile dental center has had a positive impact on their child's future oral health care.