

Information about Community Dental Center

In 1981, the City of Ann Arbor asked the University of Michigan School of Dentistry to manage the Community Dental Center (CDC). At that time, CDC was located in one of the poorest and most dentally underserved areas of the City and quickly became the dental “home” for patients who were unable to afford care from private dentists in Ann Arbor. While the area immediately surrounding CDC has changed, its mission remains the same: CDC provides dental care for physically and economically vulnerable patients who live in Ann Arbor and Washtenaw county. This includes providing services to the downtown neighborhood in which it resides.

Who are the patients served by CDC?

CDC is a special model tailored to the needs of the underserved. The clinic treated over 2,000 unique patients in FY 2016 accounting for 4,400 patient visits. Approximately 86% of the patients seen in FY 2015 and 2016 resided in Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County. About 25% of CDC patients live in close proximity to the clinic in the Water Hill and Kerrytown neighborhoods. While some of CDC’s patients may have some level of basic dental insurance, other patients pay out of pocket for their care, often provided at lower fees by dental students under the supervision of CDC’s staff dentists. Low-income Medicaid patients are responsible for approximately half of the CDC patient visits. The remaining CDC patients are treated at no charge, minimal charge, or with grant funding. This latter group comprises a rapidly growing number of severely medically compromised, geriatric and low income working individuals, particularly food-service workers. By having this mix of insured and self-pay patients we are able to provide care to the underserved.

Why can’t CDC patients be treated at the School of Dentistry, by private dentists or at other low income clinics in Washtenaw County?

The School of Dentistry serves a large number of patients from 81 of the 83 counties in Michigan and northern Ohio and Indiana. Because of the educational model and due to limited institutional resources, we are unable to treat CDC patients in the same timely manner as would be the case in the private practice setting. Patient appointments at the school generally last three hours (vs. one hour at CDC) which is a barrier for many patients. Hope Dental in Ypsilanti does not accept Medicaid and has limited capacity to provide emergency care. The recently opened Washtenaw County Dental Clinic in Ypsilanti accepts most Medicaid and Healthy Michigan plans but not Blue Cross Complete. Private dentists, for the most part, do not accept adult Medicaid benefits and do not have reduced fee programs for low-income patients. Travel time and expense is also a barrier for working low-income patients in Ann Arbor.

What plans does the School of Dentistry have for the lower level space at CDC?

The School of Dentistry has plans to renovate CDC’s lower level to accommodate patients with special needs in Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County. These patients include individuals with developmental disabilities, cognitive impairments, complex medical problems, significant physical limitations and the vulnerable elderly. Examples include patients with conditions such as Down’s syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's Disease, ALS, PTSD, Alzheimer's and other dementias, post-stroke limitations, multiple sclerosis and

rheumatoid arthritis. The clinic would be designed to provide emergency, preventative and other dental services to ambulatory patients and those who use wheelchairs.

We are currently unable to treat special needs patients at CDC or the School of Dentistry because the clinics were designed to accommodate healthy, ambulatory patients. Special needs patients require dedicated personnel to be cared for successfully. In the proposed clinic, dentists and hygienists with specialized training, working with other health and social work professionals, will collaborate to provide an efficient, safe and humane environment to deliver dental care.

It appears that the City of Ann Arbor would be assuming all the financial costs of maintaining the Community Dental Center building.

CDC only exists due to financial support from the community it serves. The University of Michigan and School of Dentistry together provide approximately \$225,000 yearly in support of the operation of the clinic. Grants and donations from the United Way of Washtenaw County fund care for the neediest patients. Individual donations and services in-kind keep CDC's dental equipment current and in good working order. We appreciate the City's past contribution by leasing the building to CDC at no charge. If the lease is renewed, CDC can develop the entire space. Additionally, we are committed to assuming the cost of groundskeeping, snow removal and necessary building improvements. Without a subsidized lease, CDC would not be able to continue and expand its service to the community. The expense of rebuilding/outfitting office space to support specialized dental equipment is prohibitive and would essentially force CDC to close its doors to the community.

Looking forward

Since 1981, this long-term collaboration between the School of Dentistry and the City of Ann Arbor has been a remarkable success and we hope it will continue for many years to come. We are proud that we have been able to provide consistent, high-quality dental services to the most vulnerable members of our community for 35 years, and that need still exists. It is our hope that this town-gown sharing project can continue to go forward as a model of what long-term cooperation can achieve for the benefit of Ann Arbor residents.