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For Immediate Release

MCHD Dentistry to add two operatories thanks to grant award by Highmark

MORGANTOWN, WV (Oct. 19, 2021) — MCHD Dentistry will soon be expanding by about 50%, from five to seven operatories, thanks to a \$50,000 grant from the Highmark West Virginia Charitable Fund for Health.

After Medicaid expanded dental benefits to include adults at up to \$1,000 a year starting on Jan. 1, 2021, MCHD Dentistry’s patient count has risen dramatically.

“Now that adults who have Medicaid have additional benefits, we cannot keep up with the demand with our current space and providers,” said Tiffany Summerlin, MCHD Dentistry registered dental hygienist who applied for the grant. “So this grant will allow us to be a dental home for many people who currently do not already have a regular dental provider.”

The grant will fund the construction of two more operatories that will be created from an existing conference room. Summerlin has plans to apply for additional grant funding with a goal of allowing MCHD Dentistry to add two more operatories, bringing the total to nine and almost doubling the current number.

“The operatories work in concert with each other, so there are some improvements that have to be made that will be shared among the four operatories that eventually will be built out,” she said.

This includes a new dental evacuation system that will provide suction for the entire office. “We are essentially doubling the demand on the current system.”

Announced this past spring, Highmark’s new West Virginia Charitable Fund for Health recently distributed nearly \$1 million in grants to 20 non-profit organizations in the state, including 14 oral health and dental care recipients.

The organization “is excited to provide critical funding to support West Virginia-based health and social service organizations, particularly those that address the social determinants of health and oral care for West Virginia families,” said Jim Fawcett, president of Highmark West Virginia, in a statement.

“We are looking forward to seeing the positive impact these grant funds will make to support the well-being of our community through this funding.”

Established in 1974, MCHD Dentistry has steadily expanded since 2010, when just one dentist and one hygienist were employed. Now MCHD Dentistry has three full-time and one part-time hygienist, plus three dental assistants.

Dr. Youseph Kassar joined the practice in June 2020 as the second dentist and now serves as interim program manager since the departure in September of Dr. Dan Carrier. A second dentist will be hired soon to bring MCHD Dentistry back up to two.

“With more operatories, it opens the possibility to bring on a third dentist in the long term, while also adding on more hygienists and assistants to match the growth,” Dr. Kassar said.

Patient numbers have steadily increased during the past decade. In 2010-11, providers saw 2,160 patients at MCHD Dentistry. That number rose to 4,304 in 2016-17, and in the first nine months alone of 2021, it skyrocketed to 6,200.

“Medicaid patients are about 90% of our current increase,” said office manager Jenna Coombs.

MCHD Dentistry treats all patients, including those with insurance, Medicaid and CHIP, in addition to offering a new patient special and sliding scale fees for those who qualify.

As the only full-service dental practice located in a West Virginia health department, MCHD Dentistry offers a variety of preventive, therapeutic, cosmetic and orthodontic treatments, including comprehensive exams and cleanings, oral cancer screenings, digital X-rays, fluoride treatments, dental sealants, bridges, same-day crowns, dentures and partials, implants, root canals, simple extractions, bleaching and whitening, porcelain veneers and Invisalign clear aligners.

In 2018, Monongalia County Health Department also launched Smile Express, a mobile dental facility that is outfitted with two fully equipped dental chairs, a panoramic X-ray and software to transmit the images back to MCHD Dentistry to be viewed by a dentist in real time. Smile Express visits schools in six counties and travels to other locations to treat individuals without a dental home.

And in June, MCHD Dentistry also started creating same-day crowns with a milling machine that, used in conjunction with a digital scanner, provides a shorter and more pleasant experience for the patient while ensuring a better crown fit.

The goal for the completion of the new operatories is within six to 12 months, Summerlin noted.

Said Dr. Kassir: “We are grateful to Highmark for this grant to allow us to grow our clinic, which will allow us to better serve our community and create more jobs.”

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out monchd.org and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd.

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