Lifelong Smiles steering committee

The Lifelong Smiles Steering Committee includes, from left, Tracy Rodgers, executive officer, Bureau of Oral and Health Delivery Systems, Iowa Department of Public Health;Julie McIntosh, division director, Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention, Iowa Department of Public Health; Mary Jane Caschera, director of quality and clinical services, Iowa Health Care Association and chairperson of the Lifelong Smile Coalition; Leif Gjovik, DDS; Waverly and Towa, Long-term Care, Iowa Medicaid Enterprise Department of Human Services; Dr. Howard Cowan, clinical professor, Department of Preventive and Community Dentistry, The University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Science.

New momentum to link dental care, older residents

Dr. Bob Russell

November 15, 2014 4:30 am • By Desiree Suker

http://qctimes.com/lifelong-smiles-steering-committee/image_7812606c-e480-57ef-bce8-3f2b5a31abe1.html

lows’ dental health director smiles broadly, appreciative of the new momentum he sees for improving the dental health care of the state’s older residents.

“I’m very proud of the first effort,” Dr. Bob Russell, the state dental director with the Iowa Department of Public Health, said Friday in Des Moines.

The new I-SMILE Silver program is debuting as a pilot project in Scott County and Lee County in southeast Iowa. The effort is funded by more than $600,000 from the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation.

It is based on the successful I-SMILE program for children, which reaches some 100,000 youngsters around the state.

A coalition called the Lifelong Smiles Coalition Partners met Friday to discuss the topic, including access issues in both counties. The meeting was preceded by a news conference at the Scott County Administrative Center in Davenport.

Russell took note of the changes that are needed to make a difference in the lives of the elderly, who may receive insufficient dental care unless they are still living at home or in a care center of some sort.

Older Iowaans don’t have many options for care since dental insurance is not part of the Medicare program.

There is also a matter of limited access. Marsha Miller, the director of Iowa Masonic Health Facilities in Bettendorf, attended the session with the organization’s director of nursing, Joely Hopla. The women said the residents get regular visits from a local dentist, but it would be “nice” to have more frequent access, Miller said.

The women were interested in the possibility of a mobile dental health unit based on one that exists for the I-SMILE program and is used in local school districts.

A mobile unit for seniors recently was introduced in Red Oak, said Jill Hamilton with Delta Dental of Iowa.

Mainland of Dubuque works at a long-term care facility called St. Vincent Franciscan Services. It has a dental clinic, and Mainland said that it makes it much easier to provide residents with regular care. He emphasized that special training is needed for direct-care workers like himself, especially as they work with patients who have dementia or other memory issues.

Some patients may be in pain because of problems with their teeth, but they will not cooperate with a caregiver. “You have to deal with the behavior, but you can learn new ways to do this,” Mainland said.

The executive director of Iowa CareGivers said workers such as Mainland provide 80 percent of the care to older Iowans. On Friday, the group endorsed advanced training for them.

Dr. Howard Cowen, a professor at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Science in Iowa City, said dental students are taken to nursing homes to learn about providing care for elderly patients. A curriculum will be developed in conjunction with I-SMILE Silver, he added.

Cowen suggested an “oral-health champion” be present in each facility and said the new program might have implications on the national level.

“We are very proud to be part of this,” he added.

Tracy Roggiers with the Iowa Department of Public Health mentioned the importance of community-based coordination with I-SMILE Silver. Several outreach strategies will be considered, she said, adding that the two-county approach will be expanded to Van Buren County next year.

“There is much to do,” she added.

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