"Health and Dental Care For Kids" Finds Solutions

According to the 2009 Kids Count report, there are more than 130,000 Missouri children who are currently uninsured. These children do not always have ready access to regular physician care, so more often than not they end up in the emergency room which translates to increased cost for us all.

With more people out of work, the number of uninsured children is sure to grow. Part of the solution would be to achieve higher child enrollment. Another part of the solution would be to increase access to public health coverage. One of the most successful examples of increased access to public health coverage is right here in St. Louis; Health and Dental Care for Kids, located at 4055 Lindell Boulevard.

The medical director, Dr. Blaine Sayre, was at the very beginning when the joint venture between Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital and St. Louis Children's Hospital began in 1992. "We had targeted 13 zip codes within the city to affect the preponderance of children who were using the emergency room after normal hours for non-emergency room visits, and we were extremely successful," said Dr. Sayre, noting there were more than 10,000 visits within the first six months of the clinic's opening.

After two years, the doctors of the clinic discovered the problem that most patients were not going to the public clinics to which they were referred. Due to the fact that approximately 60 percent of the patients were coming back to Health Care for Kids, the clinic had to adjust its hours and services to include primary care. Now, approximately 8,000 kids use the facility as their primary care provider; more than half still use the facility after hours, or from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. In addition, the Clinic sees patients from other practices after hours and on weekends—a time when most doctors' offices are closed—for acute care. The clinic sends their pediatricians a report of their visit to ensure continuity of care. This past year, the clinic accommodated more than 22,000 visits to its medical clinic alone.

In 2002, Health Care for Kids recognized the overwhelming demand for pediatric dental services and opened a dental clinic.

"The dental clinic has three full-time equivalent dentists and provides the full spectrum of preventive and restorative dental treatment. We're really proud to offer dental care," said Dr. Sayre. "It wasn't just a matter of funding or reimbursement. This was a component that simply was not readily available to the community."

Dr. Sayre maintains that almost 90 percent of Health and Dental Care for Kids patients are covered by Medicaid. For those who are not covered, the clinic employs a social worker who helps parents enroll their children for Medicaid coverage. The clinic also provides a generously discounted fee schedule for patients who do not qualify for Medicaid or any other form of insurance coverage.

By providing children with a place to receive medical and dental care, Health and Dental Care for Kids gives families a regular place to go when their children are sick. This level of support saves the hospital emergency room for real emergencies. An additional benefit to

providing care in a clinic setting is that it is cost effective; Health and Dental Care for Kids is self-supporting.

"We've always been self sufficient, as we generate income from the patients through insurance payments and a generously discounted fee schedule," said Dr. Sayre.

He also emphasized that if a family does not have money, the clinic still treats them. "We never turn away a child for lack of financial resources. We pride ourselves on providing excellent care to all children regardless of financial status," said Dr. Sayre. "That has been our long-time mission, and one that we are committed to keeping."

For more information on Health and Dental Care for Kids, contact the organization at their website healthcareforkids.org or at 314-535-7701.

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