

Florida Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

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December 2007 Newsletter

Message from our President:

Happy holidays to everyone. The FAPD, with the help of Senator Grant, is continuing to monitor the political events taking place in Tallahassee. We have not seen any significant bills passed yet that directly affect us, but are still staying on top of the situation.

The big issue is the budget. There will likely be a special session of the legislature in January to trim down the existing budget before they write next year's budget. As events unfold, we will continue to inform the membership of decisions that might affect us.

AHCA is still talking about a 20% increase in Medicaid fees, which has the approval of the governor. The reality of the situation is that the funds, which must come from the legislature, are simply not there.

Our law suit with the State of Florida is scheduled for mediation in early January. While we should always remain optimistic, an effective mediation requires, by definition, that both parties have the power to make a decision. The state's representatives do not have any money with which to make an offer; therefore, any decisive action as a direct result of this January meeting will probably not be forthcoming. I believe our best chances for a fair and equitable settlement will come with the court date currently set for June.

The following is a response I wrote to a rather scathing article written by Donna Vavala of the News Herald that was critical of Florida dentists for not participating in the state Medicaid program.

Donna Vavala's editorial, written earlier this month concerning the lack of available dental care for Bay County's poor, is timely and well written. Finding a health care provider willing to deal with the state bureaucracy is indeed a difficult dilemma for many Medicaid recipients.

Every health care provider has a moral obligation to give back to the community by providing pro bono care for the less fortunate. It is, however, one thing to provide charity services and quite another to subsidize a state responsibility. The problem with children not receiving proper care is very much a political issue. Medicaid is currently under funded nationally by about 3 billion dollars a year.

The money trail involves a double-whammy. Federal grants match 71 cents for every 29 cents the state spends, but last year, Florida returned \$20 million in 2005 matching dollars because not enough children were enrolled. The loss of federal money since 1998 is \$140 million.

Of the Medicaid budget, 90% is spent on the last year of a person's life, with 50% of that amount spent in the last 30 days of life. The children of the state of Florida, our future, make up only about 10% of the total Medicaid budget. Children's dental care makes up about 0.7% of the entire medical budget each year. We as a society have an ethical responsibility to care for our children. The best way to reduce medical costs in adulthood is to start with healthy kids. A healthy mouth is an important key to an overall health body.

56% of the children in the state of Florida are currently enrolled in Medicaid. These children have a disproportionate percentage of dental disease due to various factors such as socioeconomic conditions, diet, etc. The Florida Academy of Pediatric Dentistry is currently involved with litigation in federal court on behalf of Florida's children. It is our position that the oral health as well as the overall health of all of Florida's children is a basic right regardless of their ability to pay.

We have repeatedly requested the Florida Legislature to adequately fund Medicaid and other health access programs for children. Our requests have fallen on deaf ears. Given inflation and the increase in the Medicaid eligible population, funding has actually decreased. The Florida Academy of Pediatric Dentists, therefore, felt obligated on behalf of Florida's children to seek judicial relief through the federal courts. We believe that the courts will follow what has been the ruling in other states and mandate adequate Medicaid funding in Florida. We look forward to the day when every child in Florida can have adequate access to dental care notwithstanding their economic station in life.

One of the unfortunate results of term limits is the so called bull dozer effect. Legislators are well aware of the fact that anything they can delay dealing with, will simply be passed down to someone else to solve in the future. Tough decisions are put on the back burner and actions that are necessary for the common good of the citizenry go undecided. Will the current special legislative session this January solve the problem? I think it is highly unlikely.

Please keep updated on current events at our website: www.FAPD4kids.org.

Pete Claussen, President, FAPD

Update on Dental Home Advantage Program

Dental Home Advantage, LLC, will be meeting with AHCA Secretary Andrew Agwunobi on Monday, Dec. 3rd and we will be requesting a "carve out" of Areas 1,2,3,4 (Panhandle) to provide dental services to approximately 100,000 lives as early as April, 2008, but more realistically by July of 2008. In the next month or so, we will be contacting FAPD members in those Areas (1-4) requesting them to sign on as providers if we are successful in getting the contract. I encourage you to support this FAPD endorsed program.

Tom Floyd, CEO, Dental Home Advantage, LLC.

FAPD Honors Representative Bucher

On October 30, FAPD immediate past president Paul Werner, and past president Tom Floyd presented the FAPD "Hero to Kids Award" to state representative Susan Bucher, during the regular monthly meeting of the South Palm Beach County Dental Association. This award was to be presented to Representative Bucher during our annual general membership meeting during FNDC, but could not be as she was called into special legislative session at that time. She was selected for this award because of her support of our legislative initiatives, and her leadership in efforts to improve the health of children in Florida. When she terms out next year, we will lose a strong advocate in Tallahassee.

Next Annual Meeting

Friday June 13, Florida National Dental Convention at the Gaylord Palms Resort, Orlando.