

over 1500 patients in July 2009. We did over \$1.2 million worth of dentistry."

In February 2006, Missions of Mercy set up a dental clinic in New Orleans to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The clinic was set up at the zoo. For 6.5 days the free clinic provided dental and medical services. Some 3500 patients received dental care during that time.

As early as 2001 or 2002, a dentist from the state of Texas wanted to learn more about the MOM project. Dr. Dickinson thought it was best for the Texas dentists to observe and participate to learn how much work was involved in doing a similar project. Some of his colleagues from Tyler, Texas assisted in one of the projects and decided that the project should be held in Tyler, Texas. With Dr. Dickinson's support, it was done.

The next state to inquire was Kansas. Dr. Dickinson assisted Kansas in establishing its program and the third inquiry came from Dr. Steve Slott of Burlington, North Carolina. "Although each program differs from state to state, the basic core is to provide care to people who cannot afford to visit a private dentist," said Dr. Dickinson.

Today, a National Foundation has been formed by several states to reduce the cost of having such a project. Now, a state can contract with the National Foundation to set up the equipment and other resources necessary to carry out a project.

**Question:** What has been the most surprising element of these projects?

**Answer:** The experience of talking to people who seek dental care. You gain some understanding of how they struggle through life. For example, the first day here, a lady arrived at 11:00 a.m. and missed the cut-off for treatment by five persons. Instead of going home for the evening, the lady slept in the park to insure that she would be first in line the next day. "What we see in our daily lives is unlike what these people are used to. It gives you a reality check about your own life."

**Question:** Is access to dental care a widespread problem?

**Answer:** I believe that it is everywhere. It is widespread. The problem is concentrated mostly in the rural and remote areas of a state. We see the problem in inner cities. We see it in Northern Virginia where we do projects in pockets of poverty. Somehow we must face the reality of the problem and see how we as a profession can contribute to solving this problem. We can not do it alone but we do have to play a major role in solving it. We should

be the driving force and sit at the table with government to help solve this problem. I believe the dental profession can be a strong player in solving this access to care problem.

Dr. Rebecca King, section Chief, and Dr. Jean Spratt, Regional Dentist Supervisor, work in the Oral Health Section (OHS) in the Division of Public Health. They have dedicated their careers to improving dental health in North Carolina through dental prevention and education, focusing on services for children and working towards a healthier generation to come. At the same time, there are tremendous unmet dental needs that already exist in the adult population. Drs. King and Spratt came to volunteer with the MOM's project at Kill Devil Hills to help address some of these emergency needs. Said King and Spratt, "volunteerism is not a system of care, but it brings relief to those who receive services and can bring increased visibility to the magnitude of the unmet needs."

A non-dental volunteer sat beside me for a quick bite to eat. Her name was Mrs. Doris Walsh. Mrs. Walsh is a retiree who worked in the health care industry as a nurse for twenty years. She visited the outer banks of North Carolina nearly every summer of her childhood. Now, she lives 6 months of each year in Dare County. She read an article in her church bulletin indicating that the Interfaith Community Outreach, Inc, composed of 10-15 churches needed support for the MOM clinic. She was intrigued by the announcement in her church bulletin and decided to volunteer. Her volunteer work at the food bank gave her some indication of how people were affected by the economy. She loved being a nurse and wanted to make herself useful by giving back to her community. Mrs. Walsh did by doing blood pressure screening of patients.

For the second time, dental laboratory technicians were involved in a MOM project. At the annual convention held this past summer, Mr. Arey Grady, chairman of the North Carolina Dental Laboratory Association overheard some discussion about the MOM project. It piqued his interest and he decided that it was a project in which no patient should leave the free clinic with missing teeth, especially anterior teeth. Volunteer lab technicians made a substantial contribution to the success of the project. The lab crew consisted of 7 working technicians and two support staff. They fabricated 34 new appliances, performed several denture realignments, and performed a few denture repairs. A total of 37 patients were served making the lab cost about 12 thousand dollars.

## North Carolina Missions of Mercy

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