

Grant from physician-directed fund helps patients of Center for Mental Health receive dental care

When Maureen Faul was a teenager, she suffered from anorexia and bulimia. In her 40s, dental problems related to the eating disorders began to cause pain so severe that she couldn't sleep. Lacking dental insurance and unable to afford dental care, she kept using toothache gel for pain relief and became deeply depressed.

"I hit rock bottom," Faul says. "My teeth would keep me up for days, and with no sleep, I became more depressed."

She sought treatment for her depression at the Alexian Brothers Center for Mental Health (ABCMH) in Arlington Heights, Ill., where her therapist, Rosemary Kelley, told her about ABCMH's new "Dental Care for All" program. Established in 2014 with a \$25,000 grant from the physician-directed Health Cares Fund, the program provides free preventive dental services, including cleanings and X-rays, for ABCMH patients who otherwise cannot access routine dental care.

The Physicians Council of the Alexian Brothers Foundation awards grants from the Health Cares Fund, which is designed to improve access to healthcare and promote prevention and wellness, particularly among the most vulnerable members of the community. The fund is supported by ABHS physicians as well as patients and corporations.

Under Dental Care for All, James McShane, D.D.S., Mark Curcio, D.D.S., and Bryan Erce, D.D.S., of Medical Center Dental Associates in Elk Grove Village, Ill., provide their services to patients referred by ABCMH. While the grant covers preventive care, the practice provides advanced care "on the house" for ABCMH patients because it believes strongly in charity care and philanthropy, McShane says. Adds Dawn Wesner, ABCMH Clinician Case Manager, "What they're doing pro bono is amazing."

Referred by Kelley to the practice, Faul, 50, approached her first visit there with trepidation, worried about what she might hear about the condition of her teeth. But Erce put her at ease immediately. "He said, 'This isn't bad,'" Faul says. "He just made me feel like I was OK."

Faul had her teeth cleaned and X-rayed, and Erce later pulled a tooth, made a crown and performed a root canal – all at no cost to Faul. The result? "No more pain," Faul says.

With her dental problems resolved, her confidence has soared, and that's helping her grow her own cleaning and organizing business. She also has put to rest lingering issues from her teen-age eating disorders. "I've just kind of moved on and let it go," she says. "That was the last residual thing left from having that disease for so long... I feel great. I smile a lot more... I'm a happier person."

Wesner and Rick Germann, ABCMH Executive Director, say Dental Care for All addresses a great need because most ABCMH patients are low-income individuals who are uninsured or underinsured. Although they might have Medicaid, it covers only emergency dental care and not preventive care, Wesner says. Dental problems, she adds, can negatively affect a person's mood,

lower self-esteem, cause anxiety and limit their employment potential. In addition, research shows poor dental health can lead to cardiovascular disease, Germann says.

ABCMH had referred 38 patients, including Faul, to Medical Center Dental



Under the new "Dental Care for All" program, dentists (left to right) Mark Curcio, James McShane and Bryan Erce provide their services to patients referred by the Alexian Brothers Center for Mental Health.

Associates by late December, and Wesner says Dental Care for All eventually could help as many as 190 ABCMH patients.

"They're all very grateful," McShane says of the ABCMH patients. Faul certainly is. "They just made me feel more like a whole person, rather than somebody with problems," she says. "I don't think any of those people will know the impact they had on me and my life."

For more information about the Health Cares Fund, contact the Alexian Brothers Foundation at (847) 385-7300 or alexianfoundation@alexian.net.