COVER STORY

Why the Mission of

Two happy patients — and proud of their oral health.

Michigan Dental Association
mission of mercy
The Michigan Mission of Mercy, held June 7-8 on the campus of Saginaw Valley State University, gave hundreds of people in need a new lease on life – literally. The MDA, the MDA Foundation, volunteers and sponsors worked together to create a truly unprecedented oral access event.

A staggering 7,399 procedures were provided, with a dollar value of just over $900,000 in total. Many patients required extensive treatment, such as root canals and full-mouth extractions.

Patients at the Michigan MOM received an average of nearly $800 each in care, compared to the national average of $550 at MOM events elsewhere.

“Michigan dentists routinely help patients in great need, but this event really illustrated the scope of the state’s crisis in access to dental care,” said Dr. Stephen Harris, chair of the 2013 Michigan Mission of Mercy.

In all, Mission of Mercy volunteers provided:

- 1,210 radiographs;
- 2,742 preventive exams;
- 1,327 restorative procedures;
- 52 endodontic procedures;
- 121 lab cases; and
- 1,342 oral surgeries.

Patients also received detailed oral health educational information about the importance of good daily oral hygiene, a healthy diet and routine preventive dental care.

The Mission of Mercy consisted of a set-up day, two days of actual patient care, and a tear-down day. On the first day, trucks full of equipment and supplies had to be unloaded and their contents checked off, counted, organized, and set up. One hundred patient operatories, an on-site dental laboratory, pharmacy, office, and patient entrance and exit areas all had to be put together, with volunteers coordinated and assigned to every task. That happened on June 6, and according to the America’s Dentists Care Foundation staff, it was one of the quickest MOM set-ups, ever.

Actual patient care began on Friday, June 7. A large number of patients were lined up outside the Ryder Center, several of whom had been there since the previous day. MOM volunteers distributed water and snacks to patients in line. The doors were opened at 6 a.m. as the first group of about 30 patients entered the patient registration area. Patient registration forms were filled out and health histories obtained for all patients. Then, patients entered the medical triage area, which was needed to identify those individuals who couldn’t be treated due to medically compromising conditions (such as extremely high blood pressure, untreated diabetes, etc.).

Next, patients entered the dental triage area, where they were screened to establish their chief complaint or most urgent need. Treatment for infection and pain is the top priority at a MOM, followed by restorations, treatment (Continued on next page)
partials, and cleaning. Triage walks a fine line between what the patient desires and the treatment that would most benefit the patient. In clinics such as this, the need is great, and not every need can be met.

Patients were then treated in one of six clinic areas: oral surgery, restorative, endodontic, pediatric, prosthodontic, and hygiene. On-site sterilization, radiograph and dental supply areas supported treating dentists and staff.

Following treatment, patients were brought to the pharmacy, which provided antibiotics and non-narcotic pain medication prescribed by the treating dentist, at no charge to the patient. Prescriptions for narcotics were given to patients to take to local pharmacies, to be paid for by the MOM. Finally, all patients were given an exit interview, including additional post-op instructions if needed and an oral health kit to take home, as well as information on services and clinics throughout Michigan where patients can seek care.

The days were long for the volunteers — 12 hours each day — but the satisfaction was great. Snacks and pizza were brought in to feed the hungry MOM volunteers, many of whom were staying overnight in local hotels or on campus at SVSU facilities at their own considerable expense.

Although a Mission of Mercy event is about providing direct care to people who really need it, a secondary purpose is to help educate public officials about the very real need that exists throughout our state. The MDA publicized the MOM through several news releases, Twitter posts and media events, receiving substantial press coverage. Articles appeared in the Flint Journal/MLive, The Michigan Chronicle, The Midland Daily News, The Oakland Press and the Observer & Eccentric and hometownlife.com. Radio coverage included WWJ-AM (Detroit), Michigan Public Radio, WILS-AM (Lansing), WSGW-AM (Saginaw), and WFNT-AM (Flint). TV reports ran on CBS, ABC, NBC and Fox affiliates in Lansing, Saginaw and Detroit.  

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The Michigan Mission of Mercy
A Chairman’s Perspective

By Stephen R. Harris DDS  
Chair, 2013 Michigan Mission of Mercy

On June 6-9, 2013, more than 1,000 volunteers gathered at Saginaw Valley State University to offer something new to Michigan — a free dental Mission of Mercy. We pulled off an absolutely wonderful event! Hundreds of dentists, specialists, hygienists, dental assistants, nurses and countless lay volunteers made the weekend project a huge success.

Leading up to June, I had a pretty good idea that we were well-prepared. Funding was secured, the equipment and supplies were ready to go, and volunteers were signing up. We just had to wait until the calendar reached June 6 to put all the planning to action. And, wow, did we ever! A semi-trailer full of dental equipment was unloaded and the clinic set up in record time. Literally — the supervisor who came with the truck full of equipment rented from the America’s Dentists Care Foundation, told us so. Not bad for our first MOM!

Months of organization coming to fruition . . . seeing so many eager to help in any way needed . . . now, that was satisfying. I can’t thank our volunteer department leads enough. Everything went without a hitch. The power came on each morning and calamity stayed away. Yes, it is “organized chaos” in its way, but we all learned from it and next year will be even better.

The mission lived up to the reputation it has earned in other states. It was an emotion-fest! The patients we served were the most grateful people — friendly, patient and glad to have the opportunity to be treated. Smiles, hugs and tears were everywhere.

My biggest satisfaction as chair of the event is having you, the volunteers, get to experience a truly life-changing event. The patients certainly received the care they so desperately needed, but we, the volunteers, gained the most. You could see it on everyone’s face. It was a quiet, satisfied, gratifying feeling. It truly is better to give than receive.

Yes, let’s do it again! See you in 2014!
My Thoughts about the Mission of Mercy

By Connie Verhagen, DDS, MS
Co-Chair, 2013 Michigan Mission of Mercy

When I am asked to give my thoughts and impressions about the recent Mission of Mercy project, pictures and faces flood my mind and a sense of pride and contentment fills my being. It’s hard to put into words the visual memory and emotions of that weekend.

It was by far one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. The volunteers were remarkable. Many worked 12-plus hours and at the end of the day still had a smile on their face. Most of the volunteers worked side-by-side with people they did not even know, but shared a common passion to help the underserved.

In the middle of one of the treatment days I sat back and looked around and just smiled. I realized something very unique about the clinic — everyone was very happy and everyone wanted to be there. The dentists, assistants, hygienists, technicians and volunteers, all wanted to be there. In fact, even the patients wanted to be there.

When I think back to the Mission of Mercy project, the words that come to mind are “answered prayers.” A project of this magnitude takes immense preparation and heartfelt prayers. I am here to report — prayers answered! A dedicated committee, enormous organization, generous donors, enthusiastic volunteers and grateful patients made this year’s MOM a huge success.

And as I read the comment cards from patients, many of them expressed that we were an answer to their prayers. People in need, lacking financial resources, were able to receive dental care in our MOM clinic that weekend. Patients who had not smiled for years were given a reason to smile. No more pain and infection — instead, restored teeth or a treatment partial to replace missing or broken teeth.

It was a truly wonderful event.

Former MDA President Dr. Connie Verhagen (center right) with special guests (from left): Holly Fountain, chief of staff for Sen. Roger Kahn; Sen. Jim Marleau, and Bill Adams, district director for Sen. Kahn.
The biggest donor of all was Delta Dental Foundation, which contributed $50,000 to the MOM. In addition to its major financial contribution to MOM, Delta Dental employees rolled up their sleeves and volunteered on Friday. More than 75 employees made the bus trip to Saginaw to help in all areas of the MOM event.

“Delta Dental staff members were committed to making a difference at Michigan’s first MOM,” said Teri Battaglieri, director of the Delta Dental Foundation. “It was an extremely gratifying experience to be involved in this event, and we are proud that we were able to make a difference in the lives of so many people.”

The MDA and MDA Foundation will hold another MOM next year. The exact place and time as well as other details are still being worked out. There are many areas of the state that are dentally underserved, with many locations that could serve as potential sites for MOM events to come in future years.

Meanwhile, the 2013 Michigan Mission of Mercy is now history. Hundreds of people are living without dental pain because of the unselfish efforts of so many MOM volunteers from every part of Michigan. If you’re one of them – thank you. You truly made a difference in someone’s life. And that’s just one reason the Mission of Mercy matters!

It’s not all work at a MOM, as Dr. John Frey, of Belmont, demonstrates.

MORE PICTURES ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES

The special skills of pediatric dentists such as Dr. Sue Carron, of Novi, are always needed at charity events.
It’s “thumbs up” for dental health thanks to these MOM volunteers, including Dr. Mark Cooks, of Ypsilanti (left).

Dr. Jeff Dulude served as local chair of the MOM, and Dr. Shelly Jones served as local chair for equipment and donated supplies lead. Both are from Midland.

Dr. Roger Mead, a Midland dentist, preps a partial while a patient waits.

MDA MOM volunteers including (from left): Kathy Mielke (MDA Foundation), Andrea Sundermann (MDA staff) and Barb Kolling (Washtenaw District).
Dr. Roger Mead, a Midland dentist, preps a partial while a patient waits.

Delta Dental employees were bussed in from Delta’s Okemos headquarters and provided assistance in all areas of the MOM.

More than 1,000 dentists, staff, and others volunteered at the MOM, which was a joint project of the MDA and the MDA Foundation. Dr. Mike Jennings, Foundation president, is shown fifth from right in this photo.

Skill and care go hand in hand, from every volunteer to every patient. Shown: Dr. Ken McDaniel, of Hartland, with a patient.
Dr. Wally McMinn, of Farmington Hills, with a patient.

Oral surgeons were in high demand — here’s Dr. Vince Beniegega, of East Lansing, with a smiling young lady.

Dr. Margaret Gingrich, pictured with Journal columnist Dr. Chris Smiley, will serve as 2014 MOM chair.
Here are some of the stories that our MOM volunteers left with us on their evaluation surveys:

“I was administering anesthesia and the patient I was working with was so overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation she began to cry. I thought I was causing her to cry, and she informed me that no one had ever been that nice or caring to her . . . She hugged me and thanked me for this wonderful group of people.”

“An elderly woman who had an extraction and two composites was so very grateful to everyone. She appeared to be in her 80s, came alone, and was the first person I met outside when I arrived to volunteer. I checked in on her throughout her four hours of evaluation and treatments and escorted her through pharmacy and back to her car. She hugged every volunteer along the way, stating that she survives on Social Security and this opportunity provided her with health care she could not pay for on her own. I was impressed with the compassion shown by the dentist and dental assistant; they were so very kind to her. They made me proud to be associated with dentistry in Michigan.”

“There are just so many great stories! One of our last patients in the prosthodontic section of the clinic had a difficult Class III occlusion and couldn’t even remember a time when she had ever had front teeth. We took alginate impressions and had a flipper fabricated for her and she was so incredibly grateful! She kept looking at herself in the mirror and saying, ‘Look at you! You’re beautiful!’ It was wonderful!”

“One lady wrote on her comment card, ‘This is the second happiest day of my life. The first was when I found God.’ Another lady, upon exiting said, ‘Today was an answer to my prayers.’”

“I saw a patient who was in her thirties and was the mother of five children. One passed away last year. She was putting herself through college and working two jobs, determined to improve her current situation for her family. She would have no other access to dental care if not for MOM. She thanked me at least 10 times for being there and giving of my time . . . It made me feel proud to be a little part in her life story.”

“It was amazing not to hear any complaints about the wait. One patient actually stated, ‘It was only a four-hour wait.’ Everyone was so appreciative.”

“A patient rode his bike all the way from Coleman, Michigan. He stated it took him five hours to get there. I almost volunteered to drive him back to his home. Boy, talk about someone seeking our help!”

“This was one of the most well-organized volunteer events ever! I thoroughly enjoyed giving of myself. Everyone was professional and friendly. It was hard NOT to smile all day!”

“When can I sign up for next year?”

Just one of the many heartfelt comments received from the hundreds of Mission of Mercy patients and volunteers.
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