

## ACCESS TO CARE – A NEW BEGINNING

“DENTAL DAY – GRAND RAPIDS” was held on October 28, 2011 in the office of Dr. Ben Amato in NE Grand Rapids. The target population included senior clients, many with disabilities, who are uninsured or have Medicaid, but cannot find a dentist who will accept them as new patients.

How do you provide dental care to twenty-two clients from Area Agency for the Aging of Western Michigan, Senior Neighbors, Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and United Methodist Community House, on one day in Grand Rapids?

It’s all about people with a vision and the will to accomplish that vision through the efforts of the Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging (COHA), founded and chaired by Elisa Ghezzi, DDS PhD. COHA’s mission is to improve the oral health of older people through advocacy, professional education, public education, and research by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and evidence-based practices.

The population for Dental Day was screened for eligibility and the Area Agency for the Aging arranged transportation, handled necessary forms, and facilitated the patients’ arrival in timely fashion.

Through COHA, a 501©3 coalition with an arm called COHA CARE, ten registered dental hygienists (most were from the Grand Rapids area) worked in teams of two to take full mouth x-rays, to perform prophylaxes and oral assessments, to provide home care instructions, to develop x-rays, and work sterilization and monitor the front desk. This “collaborative practice” was authorized for PA 161 status through the Michigan Department of Community Health-Oral Health.

One of the hygienists, Pennie Lewis RDH, already had PA 161 status and was instrumental in working with the group to provide future service to at least one wheel-chair bound patient who needed a second visit to complete her prophylaxis. The other hygienists included: Cheryl Bentley, Lisa Darrow, Valerie Davis, Joanie Haaksma-Taylor, Winona Hartney, JoAnne Hodder, Pamela Kosten, Bonnie Nothoff, and Dona Petersen.

The supervising dentist, Elisa Ghezzi DDS PhD, who is a geriatric dentist, and her husband, Stephen Ghezzi DDS, were on hand this day to provide examinations, denture evaluations, extractions, prescriptions, and referrals.

PA 161 (2005) is “Public Act” 161. But it could easily be called “Prevention Access” because this is a law about providing prevention treatment to the underserved. Future “Dental Days” are possible through community collaboration. Would your dental office like to host a future “Dental Day” in Kent County or Grand Rapids? To find out how DENTAL DAY-GRAND RAPIDS was accomplished, contact Jackie O’Connor, Area Agency for the Aging of Western Michigan: [jackie@aaawm.org](mailto:jackie@aaawm.org) .

For more information about COHA and this program, contact Dr.Elisa Ghezzi: [chair@micoha.org](mailto:chair@micoha.org).

Lisa Darrow RDH  
JoAnne Hodder RDH