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News

Low-cost clinic back on its feet

Saturday, January 19, 2008 12:13 AM EST

— Dentist works to make care available to all

By Dennis Pelham

Daily Telegram Staff Writer



ADRIAN — Since a new full-time dentist took over Oct. 1, the Lenawee Dental Clinic is back on its feet and looking to expand the number of people it can serve.

Dr. Sara Bond works on David Montie Jr. Thursday at Lenawee Dental Clinic. Bond is the new full-time dentist at the clinic, which was founded in 2000 to provide services to the uninsured and others who have trouble getting dental care. The clinic had been without a full-time dentist since January 2006. — Telegram photo by Lad Strayer

Dr. Sara Bond started in June working part time in the clinic. She said she found such an overwhelming need in the community that she decided to take on the challenge of running the clinic as her full-time practice. Working with children and helping people who would otherwise not have access to dental care is a reward that makes up for the financial challenges she deals with at the clinic, she said.

Lenawee Dental Clinic, at 128 S. Broad St., was started in June 2000 to provide services to the uninsured and Medicaid recipients who have difficulty accessing dental care because of the low reimbursements paid by the program. The clinic went without a full-time dentist since Dr. John Hall left in January 2006.

Bond said she was starting a career in private practice in the Ann Arbor area, where she and her husband live, after she finished a three-year enlistment in the United States Air Force in 2006.

When she learned that dentists were needed at the clinic in Adrian, she decided to see if she could help.

She found a heavy work load, she said, and the reward of accomplishing something worthwhile. She went home exhausted at the end of each day she worked after starting part-time service, she recalled.

“I thought I was going to die I was so tired,” she laughed.

Patients she saw all seemed to have extreme needs, Bond said.

“If anyone needs a dentist these people do,” she said. “I’ve seen more need since I came here than I have in all the time I have been a dentist.”



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Her career began in the Air Force after the Lincoln Park native graduated from the University of Detroit Mercy in 2003. She said she enlisted for the challenge and opportunity to serve as well as the training and dental residency the Air Force offered.

“And just to try something different,” Bond added.

She went through the rigors of officers’ training school and was stationed one year at an Air Force base near Las Vegas then two years at a base in Missouri, reaching the rank of captain before returning to civilian life. She settled in Ann Arbor with her husband, Erik, an English instructor at the University of Michigan Dearborn campus.

Bond said she is now committed to her work at the Lenawee Dental Clinic.

“Every day is a challenge because everything is an extreme,” she said. “I really enjoy the challenge of not knowing what each day will bring.” She plans to stay, she said, “As long as it works. As long as we can keep seeing patients.”

She hopes the future will bring more financial stability to the struggling clinic, she said. It operates as a nonprofit corporation with minimal financial contributions and grants since donors generously set up the clinic with state-of-the-art equipment, she said. The clinic has applied for United Way funding and is waiting for a response in March, she said.

Additional financial support would allow hiring a second dental assistant who would make it possible to serve almost a third more than the 16 to 20 patients who now go through the clinic each day, she said. In her first three months of full-time work in the clinic, Bond has provided more than 2,000 units of dental care to 572 patients.

There are still 250 Medicaid recipients on a waiting list, she said, who can only be served if more paying patients are added to the clinic to help cover expenses. Medicaid reimburses only 10 to 15 percent of expenses of providing dental care, Bond said. Often the payments are only \$13 or \$14 for complicated services.

The clinic also offers a sliding scale of charges for patients not covered by insurance. And the quality of services is attracting more customers who are covered by insurance.

“The kind of care we are providing is top-notch, cutting edge,” she said.

Young patients enrolled in the state’s Delta Dental Healthy Kids program account for about 60 percent of the clinic’s practice, she said. That program pays a higher reimbursement rate than Medicaid, allowing the clinic to provide children oral hygiene instructions as well as dental services they otherwise might not be able to have, she said.

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