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Celebrating 25 years of Donated Dental Services



Larry Coffee, D.D.S.

Not long ago, a 36-year-old woman named Deena was referred to Donated Dental Services for care. A very brave young woman who had suffered from renal failure since age 19, she received dialysis three times a week and was ruled ineligible for a kidney transplant due to her severe dental disease. Recently, after the help of two New Hampshire DDS volunteers, a general practitioner and an oral surgeon, Deena was able to

write to us about the care she received:

“It is so nice to find people who truly care about other people. Thank you so much for giving me my smile back. I should be put on the kidney transplant waiting list very soon.”

Year 2010 marks the 25th anniversary of the DDS program under the National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped. In January, when NFDH becomes Dental Lifeline Network, the DDS name and its extraordinary collaboration will continue. We are profoundly grateful to and proud of the 15,000 dentists and 3,000 laboratories who volunteer their services; the companies that contribute in many ways; and the dental organizations that enlist their members as volunteers. Our goal is to coordinate and grow this collaboration as a program of Dental Lifeline Network—to serve more people in need and to enhance the value and impact of our work.

What has changed in the past 25 years? Our mission to help America’s truly vulnerable individuals including people with disabilities and the elderly remains the same. However, we also have been compelled to focus on more individuals like Deena whose need for dental care can prevent them from receiving life-saving medical procedures.

Dental disease and chronic need for care impact people with cancer who cannot receive chemotherapy, those with autoimmune diseases who cannot be administered lifesaving medications, cardiac patients who cannot be treated surgically, and people with crippling arthritis who are prevented from joint replacements. For these people, the alternative to dental therapy and subsequent treatment for their medical conditions is a path to progressive illness or premature death.

Our new name, Dental Lifeline Network, is inclusive of all of the people served by DDS and our other programs—the disabled, elderly or medically at-risk—because the inherent dignity of every individual is reflected in a healthy smile.

If you are one of the thousands of dentists who have participated as a DDS volunteer over the years, we thank you and hope that you share our pride in helping the 100,000 people who have received \$181 million in donated services.

If you are not a DDS volunteer, please know that from a wait list of 17,000 cases, DDS can match people in need to your practice specifications, your interests and your comfort level. As a volunteer, you review the patient profiles in advance, choose or decline to see any patient, and determine your own treatment plan. You see patients in your office on your own schedule, never pay for lab costs and a DDS coordinator facilitates the entire process including paperwork. Volunteering is easy. You treat the patient; DDS does everything else. For information, contact us at 1-888-471-6334 or www.dentallifeline.org.

Why volunteer? Karen, one of our patients from Illinois whose dental treatment qualified her for the donor list for a lung transplant, wrote: “I truly believe you all are angels here on earth to make sure people still have hope and believe never to give up. Thank you with all my heart.”

Dr. Coffee is the founder and CEO of Dental Lifeline Network.