

ACCESS TO CARE

The Western Tidewater Dental Voucher Program

by Vanessa Dunlap, Director of Health and Community Service, Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia

Dental pain can make a grown man cry. An abscessed tooth can be so severe that it leaves a person debilitated and not able to focus on anything but the pain. Many uninsured patients' only option is the Emergency Department. There the patient is treated for pain and prescribed antibiotics, if indicated. The Emergency Department underscores to the patient the importance of following-up with an appointment with a dentist.

Without insurance, an appointment with the dentist costs upwards of \$100. Clinics with dental programs may offer dental services on a sliding scale based on income. This, too, may not be affordable. Often the patient treated at the Emergency Department does not secure the needed follow-up appointment.

Emergency Department Life Coaches, a Catholic Charities program, witnessed this repeating pattern. With funding from the Obici Healthcare Foundation, the voucher program was developed. Through this program more than 200 residents of Western Tidewater have received help for dental services.

Here's just one patient's story: Wendy is 37 years old, a single mother with three dependent children and a resident of Western Tidewater. Her annual income is \$20,000, she does not have health or dental insurance and she is unable to pay for dental care. Wendy contacted Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia for assistance through the Dental Voucher Program. She had several broken teeth, needed extractions, fillings and a partial denture due to her many missing teeth.

*"...I am very grateful for the helpful, professional service. Without this program I would not have had access to the services that I needed for my extensive dental problems."
Wendy, dental patient*

Wendy met with the Dental Navigator and based on her dental needs, residency, and income she qualified for a voucher. The Navigator then scheduled Wendy's appointment with Hampton Roads Community Health Center where she established both a dental and medical home. Catholic Charities

provided payment for several teeth to be extracted, fillings, and a cleaning all within the \$300 limit.

The remaining balance on her voucher was then applied toward her partial denture and Wendy was able to afford the remaining cost. She recently completed treatment and now has a

healthy smile and regained her confidence.

The Dental Voucher program keeps a record to measure patients who return to the Emergency Department for dental issues. Of their clients only four have returned to the Emergency Department for dental pain. That's a 98% success rate! The program remains focused on making sure patients are utilizing their free voucher for a 6-month follow-up cleaning and to encourage patients on the path to regular dental care.

This funding is making a significant impact toward improving the overall dental health for the uninsured population of Western Tidewater.



Wendy is a grateful patient of the Western Tidewater Dental Voucher program.

Participating in the Dental Voucher Program

by Ralph L. Howell Jr., DDS, Howell Comprehensive General Dentistry

My commitment to oral care in Western Tidewater, and for underinsured Virginians, is borne out of the knowledge of the profound disparity in oral care. Following many dental missions, it was fulfilling to bring the Virginia Dental Association's Mission of Mercy to Suffolk. These one-day events provided dental services to over 1,000 individuals in the disparity gap.

Now, I am pleased to be one of Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia's (CCEVA) partners in the Dental Voucher program. This program continues dental help to those in need.

During the CCEVA's Life Coach program at Sentara Obici Hospital, it was noted that many patients were coming to the Emergency Department for dental needs. Often the same patients returned to the Emergency Department multiple times for the same dental issues.

Patients would state that dental services are unobtainable due to cost or that eligibility requirements restrict them from accessing care. CCEVA knew the key was to involve the dentists and working with them, care could be provided.

The Western Tidewater Dental Voucher Program is different than the donated dental services -- the year-round voucher program reimburses some of the dentists' costs to see clients with acute dental needs.

The program makes it possible for dentists to see screened patients who are enrolled in the program. Once the patient is enrolled, the Dental Navigator coordinates the dental office appointment, communicates the

scheduled appointment to the client and executes the voucher approval notice to the dental practice.

The dentist treats the patient and confirms to CCEVA the services rendered to the patient. Treatment costs are adjusted by the Dental Navigator to reflect Medicaid rates and the dentist is paid on behalf of the patient.

CCEVA strives to make this process convenient for the dentist, the office staff and the patient. The Dental Navigator remains in contact to handle questions or problems.

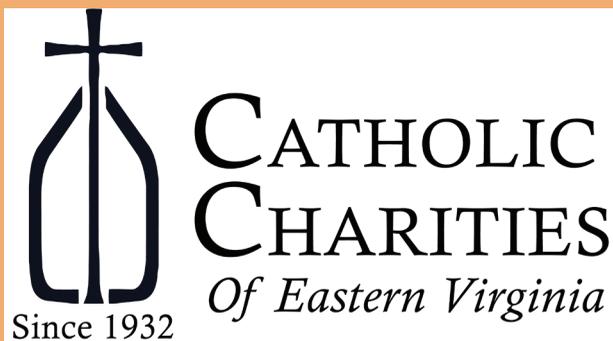
CCEVA reports a great number of dental patients have benefitted through this program due to the wonderful relationships and care provided by the Western Tidewater Community dentists.

The heart of the program is to get patients seen and treat their acute dental needs. The dentists' treatment gives them back their smile and a life without pain. This partnership between the Foundation, CCEVA and my fellow dentists, provides the care and a big dose of compassion.

"We are very fortunate in our area to have a voucher program designed to take care of some of the dental needs in our community. With this program, you can help provide service to individuals who would otherwise seek care in an emergency room setting. It's simple - you help those in need."



Ralph L. Howell Jr., DDS, is a volunteer dentist with the voucher program and a member of the Obici Healthcare Foundation Board of Directors.



**WESTERN TIDEWATER DENTAL
VOUCHER PROGRAM**
Dental Navigator: Amber Howard
757-484-0703 ext. 1051
*(please call for program details and
eligibility requirements)*

HEAR FROM TWO OTHER PARTICIPATING DENTISTS:

"It's a great experience and working relationship with Catholic Charities. It's been a seamless process to get patients in our doors to provide dental services for a healthy smile and hopefully a good experience visiting the dentist. We like to know the good and the bad because we want to continue to improve our services and make it a better place for the patients we serve." DR. LANGSTON, HEALTHY SMILES

"The Western Tidewater Dental Voucher Program is a fantastic result of the community coming together to help uninsured patients most in need of dental care in the area without the financial means. It's very satisfying to see that this program has led to a significant number of patients establishing a dental home for follow-up care and maintenance moving forward." DR. CAVES, MAIN STREET PHYSICIANS