

herald-mail.com/news/hm-childrens-mobile-dentistry-unit-rolls-into-hagerstown-today-20120220,0,3318756.story

herald-mail.com

Mobile dentistry clinic aims to put smiles on more local children's faces

Cardin attends ribbon cutting in Hagerstown for \$320K bus that will provide dental services at Washington County schools

By JULIE E. GREENE

julieg@herald-mail.com

6:27 PM EST, February 20, 2012

HAGERSTOWN

A new \$320,000 RV-like mobile dental unit is helping Walnut Street Community Health Center in downtown Hagerstown expand its dental-care services to more children in the community, health center Executive Director Kim Murdaugh said Monday.

U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, D-Md., attended a ribbon cutting for the nearly 40-foot-long mobile dental unit outside the downtown Hagerstown clinic Monday morning.

The mobile unit is “critically important for access to dental care for our children,” Cardin said.

Clinic officials wanted the mobile unit, which will make stops at schools, to do more than just provide dental cleanings and sealants, which help prevent cavities but don’t address tooth decay, Murdaugh said.

The mobile unit’s dental staff can address immediate needs such as fillings and extractions, the latter as long as the child will be able to return to the classroom, clinic officials said. An appointment at the clinic can be scheduled for more involved work.

Before the mobile unit, clinic officials who visited schools were limited to talking about dental and nutritional health, and handing out toothbrushes and toothpaste, clinic officials said.

The clinic started using the mobile unit in November 2011, visiting Head Start programs in the Hagerstown area, said Dr. Ilaya Rajagopal, a pediatric dentist and dental director for the clinic.

By the end of February, the mobile unit will begin visiting Washington County Public Schools, clinic officials said. First up will be Hickory, Lincolnshire, Winter Street, Salem Avenue and Eastern elementary schools, said Connie Richardson, office manager for the clinic’s dental practice. Those schools are Title I schools, which means they have higher populations of students from low-income families.



Parents must complete a consent form for children to be treated on the mobile unit, Murdaugh said. If a dental emergency arises, the staff might try to contact parents so they can treat the child immediately, she said.

The mobile unit has two separate areas for patients to be treated, each with a dental chair.

The 24 N. Walnut St. clinic has had a pediatric dental practice since it opened nine years ago, and expanded the dental practice to serve adults during its third year, Murdaugh said. The clinic is between North Walnut and North Prospect streets.

The clinic serves the insured and uninsured, as well as people with Medicare or Medicaid, Murdaugh said. The uninsured pay based on a sliding scale that factors in their income and the number of people in the household, she said.

About 75 percent of the 6,500 people the health center serves have no insurance or Medicaid, Murdaugh said.

The clinic has approximately 2,300 dental patients, of whom about 1,800 are children, clinic officials said.

Money from the United Way of Washington County covers dental services for people, especially children, who cannot afford to pay, Murdaugh said.

Sens. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md., supported the health center's request for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for the mobile unit, Cardin said.

The Maryland Community Health Resources Commission provided \$98,000 for the first two years of operating costs for the mobile unit, Murdaugh said. That enabled the clinic to hire a fourth dentist, Dr. Mark Kawczynski, who will work in the mobile unit, clinic officials said.

The mobile unit will be used to target dental needs of children, however its customer base might be extended to adults in the summer when school is not in session, Murdaugh said.

Richardson said the mobile unit will operate three days a week at first.

The mobile unit's six-person dental staff, including the dentist, attended an RV boot camp to learn how to drive the mobile unit, Richardson said.

Copyright © 2012, Herald Mail

Cardin attends ribbon cutting in Hagerstown for \$320K bus that will provide dental services at Washington County schools

Comments 0 Share 11 +1 0 Tweet 1 Recommend 3



U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., talks with 7-year-old Ayanna McInnis inside the Healthy Smiles In Motion Mobile Dental Unit after the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the oral care unit. The 39-foot, fully equipped mobile dental unit will provide services to Washington County Public Schools and Head Start sites. (By Yvette May/Staff Photographer)

's mobile dental clinic



(By Yvette May/Staff Photographer)

U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., cuts the ribbon for the Healthy Smiles In Motion Mobile Dental Unit on Monday in Hagerstown.