

Access to Dental Care for Underserved Veterans

Many of you are well aware of the negative publicity surrounding our military veteran's access to medical care at the VA system in the US. You may not know that many veterans have absolutely no access to dental care. Briefly, to receive dental care in the VA system a veteran has to be 100% disabled, been a former prisoner of war, or have a service-related injury to the teeth or jaws due to combat wounds or trauma. Many veterans do not meet these qualifications but are still in need of quality dental care.

I have been meeting with the director of the Allentown VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) on how we may be able to increase access to care for our neglected veterans. The dental clinics at Lehigh Valley Hospital are willing to help out, but federal law prohibits the VA from making direct referrals to a single entity. However, they are allowed to provide a list of dentists and clinics that are willing to provide care. This is where you can help.

I am asking you to consider taking on ONE needy veteran in your practice and providing basic comprehensive care at no charge. I know that many of us have veterans in our practices already, but there are those who are living in poverty or in veteran's homes (like Victory House) who have no means to afford any dental care. It would be great to have members of the LVDS step up and create a model of cooperation that will address the needs of our heroes who have been neglected for so long.

In order to make this work, we will need not only general dentists but specialists as well. Specialists may need to see a number of different veterans if their care is too complex for general dentists. We also could use some donations from dental labs in the area as I anticipate providing dentures to some of these men and women. The local VA has agreed to help identify those in need and to be sure that their medical health will be not put us or our staff members at risk.

There are other programs being run in the nation that are providing things like Give Vets A Smile, a one-day campaign to get veterans out of pain. I envision this to be bigger and more comprehensive, and if successful this could be a model for the state and possibly the nation. I also believe that we can get positive publicity and this can be a practice builder for our members.

If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact me by email with your name and office address and phone number, and feel free to send me your questions or concerns. I am planning to get this program off the ground by mid-summer 2016. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important access to care issue for those who have bravely served our country.

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