

Gus Discusses Importance of Dental Care for Low-Income Children

Each February, the American Dental Association promotes the need for greater awareness about the importance of and access to dental health, particularly among children.

A key event held in communities throughout the United States during February is "Give Kids a Smile ", in which local dentists provide free dental care and preventative education to low-income children and raise awareness in the community. .

Here is an excerpt from an opinion piece written by Gus and previously posted on this blog highlighting the issue of dental health . . .

"Brush your teeth" is a phrase many parents repeat to their children every day. Yet despite parental vigilance and regular brushing, even best efforts at good oral hygiene can still fall short. This is why having access to dental health care is so important.

Unfortunately, obtaining regular dental visits is difficult for many low-income families who do not have access to affordable dental health insurance. Left untreated, ailments of the mouth can lead to abscess, and in extreme cases, death from the spread of bacteria.

On Feb. 22, Gus participated in a "Give Kids a Smile" event at the dental office of Daniel Bertoch and Alina de la Torre in Citrus Park, which was serving children from the HOPE Children's Home.

While there, he interacted with the kids as they waited for their appointments and expressed his support for efforts to raise awareness for and improve access to dental care for low-income children.

The Tampa Tribune covered this event . . .

Although the dental office is usually closed Fridays, staff members agreed to open it exclusively for the children. The staff

provided food, drinks, superhero movies and Sunshine the Clown for face painting and animal balloons while the kids waited for their turn.

"I love it; it is awesome," said Darlene Doup, a house parent at Hope. "The children actually enjoy coming to the dentist."

Each child's turn included an exam, X-rays, and a cleaning. If any of them had a serious issue, the doctors addressed it. The event is usually a one-day opportunity, but Bertoch and de la Torre commit to the patients for as long as they're needed.

Bertoch said he participates in the program not only because he can help some children but also because he wants to help all children. He wants to create a political awareness of the need for the funding of children's dental care. This is the reason he invited U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis to the event.

"The U.S. Surgeon General said dental care is the No. 1 unmet health-care need amongst children and special-needs populations," Bertoch said. "This event is giving us the opportunity to show Bilirakis why we need this."

"I'm part of the solution, but not without proper funding," Bertoch said. "We can't just do one-day donated dental service and think that's going to be a dental program that's going to take care of needy children."

Bilirakis spoke with Bertoch about the needs and then talked to the children.

"I know there's a real need in the community for dental work and pediatrics in general," he said. "If there's a need in the community, we want to address it."