

Oral Health Total Health: Sharing Smiles Day 2010

The second annual sharing smiles day occurred on March 28th, 2010. It was an informative day where the attitudinal barriers between all dental professionals and people with special needs were removed and positive relationships were fostered. Sharing Smiles Day is put on by Oral Health Total Health (OHTH), a non-profit organization with a mission to advocate, educate and improve the oral health care for persons with special needs.

One of the primary reasons for such a day to be created is because of the lack of treatment of persons with disabilities in dentists' local offices for reasons concerning a lack of comfort or familiarity. Many dentists claim they do not feel comfortable caring for these individuals because they have never had prior interactions with persons who have special needs. For this and other reasons, patients may travel several hours for a 15-minute check up at Mount Sinai Hospital. The day included a carnival morning of various games and face painting led by the dental students, a luncheon and demonstrations led by faculty dentists in partnership with



Colgate – on proper oral care. Through Sharing Smiles Day events Oral Health Total Health hopes to foster comfort and care amongst all those participating, remove any existing attitudinal barriers, bring awareness to the issues faced by persons with special needs and ultimately improve both the current and future oral health practices for this population. AO Pi chapter members in attendance included **Ralph Dana,**

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Jaelyn Glick, Sari Hershenfield, Dustin Kirshen, Sari Novak, Geoffrey Sas, Ali Sigal and Shawn Sharma.

Initially organized by the students and faculty of the University of Toronto, Faculty of Dentistry, each year, OHTH plans to approach additional Canadian dental schools to host Sharing Smiles Days in their communities. Currently there are two active programs, University of Toronto and University of Western Ontario with six new programs coming fall 2010.

So why is it so important to be raising awareness? The Mount Sinai Hospital program cannot refer these individuals to other programs or community practitioners because these resources simply do not currently exist. Unless there is an immediate infusion of resources, the access-to-care issues will worsen before they improve for these individuals with special needs, placing them at increased risk for pain and dysfunction caused by untreated oral disease. OHTH's main goal is to provide Mount Sinai's dental clinic with the funding it needs to continue its fundamental services for this population, and by events such as Sharing Smiles Day, we continue to raise awareness. For more information, please visit www.ohth.ca

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