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GraceMed dental care gets grant

Funding of \$520,000 will aid the clinic in serving uninsured and underserved people in rural Kansas counties.

BY KAREN SHIDELER
The Wichita Eagle

GraceMed Health Clinic will get \$520,000 to provide dental services to people with little or no access to care in counties around Wichita.

Its grant was one of several announced Wednesday to expand dental care to uninsured and underinsured Kansans, especially in rural areas. The money is from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and five private foundations.

GraceMed's money will fund a dental hygienist and portable equipment for visits to schools, preschools, assisted living centers and similar sites, said executive director Dave Sanford. Eleven counties will be served by the end of three years; the project will begin later this year or early next year in Butler, Cowley and Sumner counties.

The grants are part of the second year of the state's "hub and spoke" program. GraceMed is one of nine clinics that will be a hub; the spokes are the sites at which services are provided.

"We know there's a huge need," Cathy Harding, executive director of the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved, said at a news conference at GraceMed.

Providing dental services on a regional level makes sense: "There are many areas where local projects are just not going to be developed and sustained," said Kim Moore, head of the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund.

It's one of the foundations providing money. The others are the Kansas Health Foundation, the Sunflower Foundation, Delta Dental of Kansas Foundation and Reach Healthcare Foundation.

GraceMed is one of five clinics getting money for expansion; the others are in Salina, Hays, Pittsburg and Junction City. Their projects will serve people in 40 counties; all but five of the counties are designated as "dental health professional shortage areas" by the federal government.

Four clinics, including Hunter Health Clinic in Wichita, are getting \$75,000 each to support dental professionals' salaries.

Hunter Health's money will allow it to continue its hub efforts with Good Samaritan Clinic, Healthy Options for Kansas Communities and the Center for Health and Wellness, all in Wichita.

GraceMed will work with schools, health departments, dentists, social workers and others to determine needs in the counties it plans to serve.

In the second year of its grant, it will add McPherson, Marion, Kingman and Harper counties to its outreach efforts. Elk, Chautauqua, Pratt and Barber will be added in the third year.

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