

Piggy-back to Children's Oral Health

By Paula Wilson
President and CEO
Valley Community Clinic



When the Valley Community Clinic's Dental Center opened in 2003, its program was created for, and focused on, adult patients. However, when the VCC Pediatric Center opened in 2005, Dental Director Dr. Rachel Goldberg, became concerned that very few children were coming to the Dental Center. She was even more concerned because those children that did come in were showing serious tooth decay at very young ages. She determined to combat both her concerns.

When Dr. Goldberg was introduced to the concept of a "dental home" for children that began in their first year of life, she knew this had to

be a reality at VCC. The American Association of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that every child receive an oral health assessment by age 6 months, and that babies have a dental home by age 1 year. Per the American Association of Pediatric Dentistry, the "Dental Home" delivers "a child's oral health care in a comprehensive, continuously accessible, coordinated and family-centered way via a licensed dentist. This enhances the dental professional's ability to assist children and their parents to achieve optimum oral health care for overall health of the child." An aggressive oral health program for infants and young children (6 months – 6 years) is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and is key in reducing childhood caries and greatly increasing childhood oral health.

But how could she get the children, especially the very young ones, into the Dental Center? How do you create an opportunity to teach the parents the importance of preventative care and good oral health care? When money is scarce, how do you convince parents that children who barely have teeth still need to see the dentist?

Dr. Goldberg realized that she already had a large pool of potential patients through VCC's rapidly growing new Pediatric Center. She needed to figure out a way to 'drive' these patients to the Dental Center. She attempted to get the Pediatric Clinicians to provide fluoride varnishing and some oral health education, and she did Clinician trainings to further that goal. But this did not prove to be a practical solution. The Pediatricians were focused on other physical health issues and simply didn't have the time to provide oral health screenings and education as Dr. Goldberg envisioned. Although the pediatricians responded positively to Dr. Goldberg's requests that they refer their young patients to the Dental Center, very few new appointments resulted from these referrals, since the parents were always anxious to get their children home after a doctor's visit.

Innovative & Creative Piggy-Back Program

Then Dr. Goldberg hit upon the idea of "piggy-backing" oral health care onto well-child visits, beginning at age 6 months. To our knowledge, this concept had never before been tried. Rather than rely on referrals, she assigned a Registered Dental

Assistant to the Pediatric Center two mornings a week. During the wait for the Pediatric Clinician, the RDA provides basic oral health education to the parent (and the child, if old enough), and applies fluoride varnish. This simple, yet aggressive infant oral health program is calculated to significantly reduce childhood caries and create a cavity free childhood for our most vulnerable children. VCC can now be assured that every young pediatric patient receives this vital basic oral health education and the essential fluoride treatments.

Dr. Goldberg also wanted to ensure that these new patients were then actually seen in the Dental Center for a full dental exam. She created and set aside special dental appointment slots for 'new pediatric patient' visits to ensure that these children can be seen in a timely manner. The RDA in the Pediatric Center can actually make appointments for future dental visits, while encouraging the parents to go immediately to the Dental Center for a more thorough exam for older children. She/he will even personally escort them! Dr. Goldberg has decreed that all 'walk-ins'

directly from the Piggy-Back Program are to be seen immediately in the Dental Center. This helps to establish positive feelings regarding the Dental Center in leery (and often cranky) patients, and shows patients and parents just how great the service and quality of care is at



***Dr. Rachel Goldberg, Dental Director
Valley Community Clinic, North Hollywood, CA***

VCC Dental Center. Dr. Goldberg wants VCC's Dental Center to be the Dental Home to all its pediatric patients.

Since the inception of the "Piggy-Back" Program our pediatric dental program has grown from 125 patients to almost 600.

Since 2005, Paula Wilson has served as President/CEO for Val-

ley Community Clinic (VCC). She is responsible for the overall management of the agency, and in partnership with the Board of Directors, ensures that the Clinic remains true to its mission statement. She oversees the strategic planning process and charts the course for the agency's future.

Ms. Wilson joined VCC in 1992 as Vice President for Planning and Development, and subsequently built a fundraising department that includes grant-writing, public relations, marketing, and outreach to the community, corporations, and government entities. During that time, she increased fundraising in the private sector through a combination of special events, foundation giving, and corporate

support. In 2001, Ms. Wilson developed VCC's 5-year expansion plan and launched a successful \$5 million Capital Campaign.

Ms. Wilson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration from the University of Puget Sound, Washington, and Certifications from Indiana University in "Principals of Fund Raising Management" and "Managing Capital Campaigns".

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