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## Portland Press Herald    Maine Sunday Telegram

### Dentists go the extra smile

Two dozen of them and their hygienists provide free care to the poor, treating up to 700 people who lack insurance.

By BOB KEYES, Staff Writer

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Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer  
Dentist Barry Saltz puts a filling in a tooth for Shawna Iankoulova during a free clinic Friday at the dental offices of Demi Kouzounas in Scarborough. He is assisted by Michelle Hand, right, and his son Adam. Saltz and Kouzounas organized the free clinics in the Portland area.

On Friday, dentists in the Portland area opened wide their hearts and wallets.

As part of their Dentists Who Care for Me one-day clinic, the dentists provided free cleaning, fillings and extractions to low-income people who had urgent and pressing needs for dental care.

Dr. Demi Kouzounas, who practices at the Dunstan Dental Center in Scarborough, estimated that 700 people or more received care at the 13 participating dental offices in the Portland area. In all, 24 dentists and their hygienists participated.

"We had over a hundred people in our office alone," said Kouzounas, co-coordinator of the event. "They were lined up as early as 5 a.m. or so. We had a real rush, and we are told it was like that at other offices, as well. We're hearing similar stories all over."

Organized under the umbrella of the Greater Portland Dental Society, the program is the first of its kind in Maine, said Dr. Barry Saltz, the program's other coordinator. He hopes it will become an annual event that eventually spreads statewide.

The dentists in the Portland area loosely modeled Friday's free clinic on a similar program in Lewiston, which has been offered by a single dentist.

"We kind of thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to do this as a group instead of a one-dentist show, if you will?' So now it's a group effort, and our next step will be to expand it," Kouzounas said.

She estimated that the dentists provided more than \$50,000 worth of care. They closed their offices to regular business and began seeing patients at 8 a.m. Before that, many provided hot coffee for patients who

waited to come in from the cold. Most of the dentists and their staffs offered free care throughout the day, although a few closed at midday.

Much of the care was routine, but urgent, Saltz said. Typically, the hygienists saw patients first for cleanings and evaluations, then sent them on for X-rays and additional treatment, if necessary. In extreme cases, patients were referred to specialists.

Saltz said it was apparent from the outset that the vast majority who took advantage of the clinics had not received dental care in a long time. "We saw a lot of people who were in a lot of pain," he said.

Kouzounas said, "We weren't talking about patients that maybe wanted a cleaning. We saw patients with definitive, serious problems."

Dentists Who Care for Me targeted low-income patients, but the dentists didn't ask them to document their financial situations.

"We trusted what they told us," Saltz said. "We had one patient turned away because he has insurance. This clinic was not for him. This is for the people who fall between the cracks."

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Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer  
Dana MacLean of South Portland checks out the filling put in by dentist Demi Kouzounas at Friday's free clinic. "I think it's a great thing they're doing. It's really admirable," he said.