

Dental center for disabled will expand

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Richmond Memorial Hospital's satellite dental center on the North Shore is preparing for an expansion after being open for only six months.

The satellite center, located across the street from St. Vincent's Medical Center on Castleton and Bard avenues in West Brighton, serves handicapped and Medicaid-eligible patients. The satellite center opened in April because many patients said a North Shore location would be more convenient than trips to the dental clinic, located at the hospital in Princes Bay.

The expansion primarily involves adding space to the waiting room to accommodate people in wheelchairs, said Christopher Boylan, dental services coordinator.

The satellite center already is equipped with two custom-designed dental chairs intended for handicapped patients, as well as a small laboratory. It is open on weekday mornings.

Richmond Memorial Hospital started its program about five years ago, said Dr. Richard Trushkowsky, who was one of the dentists initially involved, along with Stephen Hartman and A. Stanley Kosan, founder and director.

"We realized that there wasn't a program for working with the handicapped on Staten Island, but there was a call for it," Trushkowsky said. "Most dentists don't have the facilities or the time to work with the handicapped."

The past years have been rewarding and challenging, Trushkowsky said. For the dentist, working with people with disabilities sometimes requires patience, he said. Also, some of the communication with the patient is non-verbal, he said, so the patient and the dentist can develop a rapport. Trushkowsky said it also is gratifying for a dentist to know that he is serving someone who otherwise may be neglected.

The clinic strives for consistency, he said. Every effort is made to match patients with one particular dentist, so a patient does not feel shuffled around. The program itself is growing each year, as more than 6,000 patients were served last year and hospital officials project serving about 9,000 patients this year.

Trushkowsky has been involved in an experimental project with Caridex, a solution used by dentists as an alternative to drilling. Caridex can dissolve decay on a tooth, and Trushkowsky said while many dentists have been interested in it over the past several years, not much documented research is available on how it affects the disabled community.

Trushkowsky presented a clinic outlining his work with the disabled during last year's annual state Dental Society meeting, and he will make another presentation when the society convenes next month in Manhattan.

To date, the satellite center has been serving patients from Brooklyn and from St. Vincent's, as well as North Shore residents.

The clinic also has satellite centers at Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook and at the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto, in Pleasant Plains. It also serves people in connection with programs at New York University and the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook.