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Mentoring in Millinocket Pays Big Dividends

Dr. Lisa Jacob Helps Bring Dental Assistant Career Training to the Region

Millinocket, ME – May 23, 2008 – Pediatric Dentist Lisa Jacob understands the challenges of living in rural Maine where educational opportunities are limited. As Dental Director for Katahdin Valley Health Center (KVHC), a rural health center that receives federal grants to provide high quality care to low income, uninsured and under-insured community members, she clearly gets it that Maine has a problem with lack of access to dental care.

Not one to sit on the sidelines, Dr. Jacob decided to do something about both of these issues. She knew that if local students became interested in pursuing dental careers, many would stay in the area to live and work.

So, she became a committed mentor to local students – and now that work has paid off as a new dental assistant training program opens this fall at the Katahdin Region Higher Education Center.

Dr. Jacob agrees wholeheartedly with research that shows mentoring is the most important factor in influencing a student’s decision to pursue a career in the dental profession.

In area schools, she makes presentations about the importance of choosing a career – and advocates for choosing the dental profession.

“Sometimes in rural areas, students don’t think a lot about continuing their education after high school. I try to spark interest in the dental field because it includes such a diverse choice of opportunities, whether a student wants only a few months of training to become a dental assistant, or wants to go to college to become a hygienist or go on to dental school,” Dr. Jacob explains.

For high school students, her presentations include an offer to visit her at Katahdin Valley Health Center’s dental clinic. Students can come several times a week to observe her and her staff.

“By bringing them to the dental clinic, they can see in real life terms what it means to be a dental assistant, hygienist, radiographer or dentist,” she says. This personal experience often captures the student’s interest – and then it’s on to the next step of education and training.

For those students who decide they want to be a dental assistant, the new program provides the necessary training.

“Until our partnership with the University of Maine at Augusta (UMAA), there was no school near KVHC’s Millinocket dental clinic that offered this training,” she says. “If a student decides he or she would like to pursue this type of career, I want to do what I can to give them a chance to get the necessary training.”

That ‘on the ground’ work has created strong interest in dental careers in the Millinocket area. So much so, that this fall UMAA will offer dental assistant training courses at the Katahdin Region Higher Education Center in East Millinocket.

Using a new interactive technology, the teacher is based in Augusta, while the students in Millinocket experience what will be as real as if they were in the same room. For the hands-on lab work, students will continue to use KVHC’s Dental clinic facilities. They may even have the opportunity to learn hands-on clinical by working with Dr. Jacob at KVHC.

“This is a very exciting progressive step forward for the area’s youth interested in dentistry,” Dr. Jacob explains. “Having the courses offered locally means more students can enroll and work toward certification. I’m thrilled!”

The local training also gives Millinocket area students an opportunity to follow a career and find work in their hometown community.

“Being a rural dentist in a public health setting is very rewarding,” Dr. Jacob says. “And then to be part of this new educational program is icing on the cake.”

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