

# Perspectives

## YOU ARE NEVER FULLY DRESSED WITHOUT A SMILE

*It's what you wear from ear to ear,  
and not from head to toe that matters.*

—Little Orphan Annie

A healthy smile conveys vitality, self-assurance, and friendliness. In our beauty-conscious society, people are often judged, and therefore judge themselves, by their smile. When that smile is destroyed by dental disease, the result is often loss of self-esteem and damage to overall physical and mental health.

No one understands better than the members of the American Academy of Esthetic Dentistry (AAED) the critical association between a beautiful smile and a person's self-esteem, confidence, and social reception by others. The AAED was the first to understand the importance of esthetics as part of comprehensive, integrative, and holistic treatment of patients. Many people in this country are benefiting from the increased awareness of these issues because of the direct and indirect educational efforts of this academy and its membership.

There is a health care crisis in America, and it is affecting far too many of our children. In fact, oral disease has been called the neglected

epidemic. It deserves national attention and intense, definitive action.

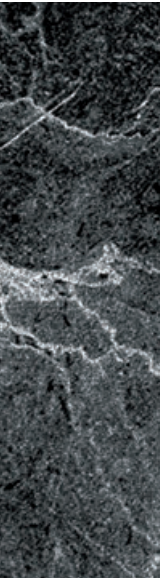
Dental decay is the most common untreated chronic childhood illness and one of the most easily preventable. Every year, dental-related illness is a leading reason why underserved children miss school, accounting for more than 51 million missed hours a year.<sup>1</sup> Children are in pain, and something needs to be done about it. This is true pain, the kind that can lead a child to stop eating and/or drinking, the kind that is often a precursor to cellulitis, an infection that swells the face and can be deadly if left untreated.

Academy member Dr. Cherilyn Sheets created The Children's Dental Center (TCDC) in Inglewood, California, 10 years ago. It is a magical place that transforms pain, fear, and tears into beautiful smiles—a true dental home composed of two buildings. The Smile Store is the treatment center, with 10 cheerful child-friendly operatories. The Toothfairy Cottage is the educational center, which uses the Toothfairy Island new, highly interactive, culturally and age-appropriate health curriculum to support all educational activities. This oral

health educational program can be adapted for centers, offices, and classrooms, as well as community-based venues. The engaging, character-based curriculum covers five core areas: biofilm control, nutrition, germ transmission, science experiments, and safe play.

The blend of quality treatment protocols and curriculum-based prevention education sets the stage for a consistency of care that did not exist when it came to treating children whose parents lacked the ability to pay for excellent care and needed dignified and empowering assistance. Through behavioral change, coupled with dental care of urgent problems, the family's immediate needs are addressed while creating a future of diminished dental need and greater self-esteem. TCDC has given thousands of children back their smiles.

The Children's Dental Center is so highly regarded for its work that it has served as the model for the



establishment of similar children's dental centers throughout the country. Inspired by TCDC's innovative educational approach to oral health, Academy member Dr. Joseph Greenberg established the highly successful Kids Smiles in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which has just opened its second facility. Healthy Smiles for Kids of Orange County in California opened this past August, and Dr. Michael Miller and Dr. Ingrid Castellanos, members of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, are in the process of establishing a program in Houston, Texas.

Oral health care has too long been denied the attention it so desperately deserves. But now representatives from these children's dental centers are joining industry, clinical, academic, and organizational leaders to form The National Children's Dental Foundation (TNCDF). This foundation will support the proliferation of and access to community-based comprehensive (education, prevention, and treatment) pediatric dental centers throughout the

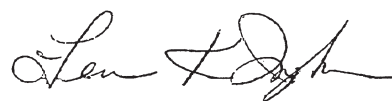
United States to provide critical care for underserved children.

Because dental disease affects much more than decaying teeth; many of these children experience complications that can devastate overall health and well-being, and financial and social costs that significantly diminish quality of life. Missing teeth can hinder speech development. And even for a very young child, having unsightly or missing teeth can take a devastating toll on self-esteem. Children with bad teeth often do not want to open their mouths to answer questions in school or talk to classmates. They are afraid to smile. They become socially isolated.

Following TCDC's integrated model of comprehensive oral health care, TNCDF's network of centers will provide on site and community outreach programs for underserved children that deliver the best approaches to eliminate dental disease, optimize oral and overall health, effectively reduce student absenteeism, and significantly

enhance quality of life and family productivity. TNCDF is the solution in a society in which there are endless social, political, economic, behavioral, and environmental barriers to pediatric oral health.

Every child deserves to be "dressed" with a healthy smile!



Fern K. Ingber, MEd

#### REFERENCE

1. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General (Executive Summary). Available at: <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/AboutNIDCR/SurgeonGeneral/ExecutiveSummary.htm> (accessed January 20, 2006).

*Fern K. Ingber is the founding executive director for the National Children's Dental Foundation and is president and CEO of Toothfairy Island. Prior to working in the field of dentistry, Ms. Ingber served as president of the Cancer Treatment Research Foundation, executive vice president for the National Health Museum in Washington, DC, primary strategist for the establishment of the American Cancer Society Breast Cancer Network, and founding general manager of the National Marrow Donor Program.*

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