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FLORIDA DENTAL ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION PROVIDES MORE THAN \$2 MILLION IN DENTAL CARE AT NO COST TO NEARLY 1,850 FLORIDIANS

Fifth Florida Mission of Mercy Event in Orlando Offers Relief from Pain and Infection and Restores Smiles

ORLANDO, FL – The Florida Dental Association Foundation (FDA Foundation) hosted its fifth *Florida Mission of Mercy* event on March 22-23 at Edgewater High School, which provided close to 1,850 Floridians with donated dental care valued at over \$2.07 million.

“Over the past two years, the Florida Dental Association’s Mission of Mercy saved my teeth and gave me back my smile,” said Marcia Burr, who lives in Gainesville and attended the 2018 and 2019 Florida Mission of Mercy events in Fort Myers and Orlando. “Last year, they did extractions, cleaned my teeth and connected me to a clinic near where I live to continue the work on my teeth over the past year. This weekend, I returned and finished the all rest of my work. I am so grateful to them that next year when they do this event, I’m going – not as a patient, but as a volunteer.”

The Florida Mission of Mercy is a two-day dental event sponsored by the FDA Foundation to provide treatment to patients, who for many reasons, lack access to dental care. The first-come, first-served event is held in a different location each year. Previous *FLA-MOM* events held in Tampa, Jacksonville, Pensacola and Fort Myers have provided more than 8,000 patients with donated dental care valued at more than \$7.37 million.

“We are honored to have the opportunity to serve Floridians who are in need of dental care and may have otherwise had to seek temporary care at hospital emergency departments,” said Bob Payne, DDS, president of the FDA Foundation. “The Florida Mission of Mercy brings together over 1,800 dentists, dental professionals and other volunteers from across the state to help relieve pain and restore smiles, while promoting oral health awareness and education.”

While the *Florida Mission of Mercy* provides much-needed relief to thousands, the high volume of patients participating in this program also highlights the critical need to promote oral health education, prevention and access to routine dental services in Florida. Oral health is critical to overall health and success, and the challenges of accessing routine dental care result in repeated visits to the emergency room for preventable dental problems, missed days of school due to toothaches, and lower GPAs and graduation rates.

“There is a significant need to support public health dentistry in Florida and promote dental care for underserved communities,” added Dr. Payne. “Many Florida Dental Association members provide free dental treatments and education in their communities year-round through *Project: Dentists Care*, Florida Donated Dental Services, and other volunteer programs.”

To help improve oral health for all Floridians, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) developed *Florida’s Action for Dental Health*, a comprehensive effort to address obstacles to dental care in Florida. This initiative includes efforts to expand public health dentistry, promote attainable care for the uninsured and underserved, and support and expand volunteer safety net programs like the *Florida Mission of Mercy*.

This year, the Florida Dental Association is supporting proposed legislation that would help increase access to dental care and improve the oral health of all Floridians, particularly those with the most need. This legislation, SB 716 and HB 465, would re-establish a dental student loan repayment program for those who practice as Medicaid providers in rural and underserved areas and expand the Florida Donated Dental Services program, which matches volunteer dentists and dental labs with patients who are elderly, disabled or medically compromised and cannot afford care.

“Everyone should have the opportunity to have good oral health,” said Dr. Jolene Paramore, president of the Florida Dental Association. “We need to collaborate and work for solutions to leverage our dental workforce to provide oral health education, prevention and the highest standard of care to Florida’s underserved and rural communities.”

The FDA Foundation and *Florida Mission of Mercy* Committee have also spearheaded a first-of-its-kind study to evaluate the impact of a *Florida Mission of Mercy* event on local communities and emergency departments. This Impact Study aims to gain a better understanding of the patients who seek dental care at *Florida Mission of Mercy* events, their access to dental care outside of this event, their use of hospital emergency departments for dental problems, and the effect of this event on emergency department utilization.

For more information, please visit www.FLAMOM.org

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About The Florida Dental Association Foundation

The Florida Dental Association Foundation (FDA Foundation) is the charitable arm of the Florida Dental Association (FDA), a statewide association representing Florida-licensed dentists. The mission of the FDA Foundation is to promote dental health for all Floridians. To learn more, visit www.floridadental.org/foundation.