

Wisconsin Dental Association: Emergency rooms not the place for non-traumatic dental care

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Wisconsin Dental Association Vice President Dr. Patrick Tepe of Verona today released the following statement in response to the "Report on Dane County Hospital Emergency Department and Urgent Care Visits for Non-Traumatic Dental Pain."

"On behalf of the 3,000-plus member dentists of the Wisconsin Dental Association, we commend Public Health Madison and Dane County and the Oral Health Coalition of Dane County for helping shine a light on the inappropriate and expensive use of hospital emergency rooms and urgent care centers for non-traumatic dental care.

"As this report shows, providing dental care in an ER or urgent care center is costly. It also focuses only on providing medications to reduce dental disease symptoms, such as pain, fever and swelling, while failing to directly address the cause of the person's infection.

"Preventive care and early treatment of dental disease in a dental office are cost-effective and protect against advanced dental disease. Regular care in a dental office saves patients from pain, minimizes time in the dental chair, reduces ER visits and keeps treatment costs down for consumers, insurance companies, hospitals and the government.

“In Wisconsin, annual preventive care (i.e., two professional dental exams, two cleanings and a set of X-rays) averages \$27 per month — less than the cost of most people’s cell phone bill. Obtaining care in a dental home rather than an emergency room also strengthens the dentist-patient relationship, allows for continuity of care and helps patients understand the important role they play in their dental health by practicing good daily oral hygiene, eating a healthy diet, drinking fluoridated water and abstaining from tobacco use.

“WDA dentists do know that, unfortunately, dental care remains financially out of reach for some people. That is why dentists do serve and do make a difference in their communities by providing charitable dental care to children and adults in Dane County and across the Badger State. A recent survey of WDA members showed that Wisconsin dentists quietly donate in excess of \$9.6 million in charitable care annually through their private practices. This is in addition to unpaid patient bills, volunteering with community programs and clinics and more than \$124 million in non-reimbursed medical assistance care.

“The WDA and its member dentists welcome the opportunity to work with state and local officials and oral health advocates on helping more people establish dental homes and reducing the use of ERs and urgent care centers for non-traumatic dental care.”