



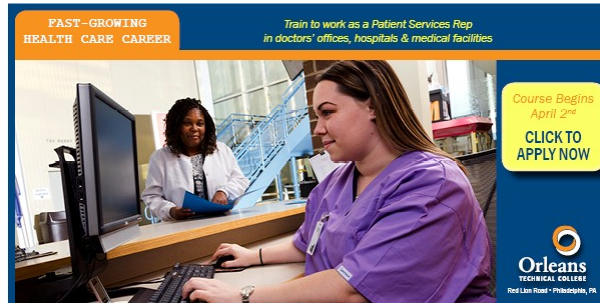
Samantha Bambino

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Associate Editor of the Lower Bucks Times

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Something to smile about



Southampton's HealthLink Dental receives \$5,000 grant for its "Connecting Oral Health and Overall Health" program

By Samantha Bambino

The Times



A healthy community: HealthLink Dental was recently awarded a \$5,000 grant from Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation. The money will help fund its "Connecting Oral Health and Overall Health" program, which provides free screenings for high blood pressure and diabetes, illnesses that can greatly affect oral health. Source: HealthLink Dental Clinic

Here's a not so fun fact—there are more bacteria in your mouth right now than there are people on Earth. If not cared for, these germs can cause gum disease, which is linked to a host of other illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes, a connection many are unaware of.

To help educate the community, Southampton's HealthLink Dental offers a "Connecting Oral Health and Overall Health" program, which was recently awarded a \$5,000 grant.

The money came from Richmond, Virginia's Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation, which supports nonprofit causes that provide basic human needs, promote education and encourage community vitality. HealthLink Dental, located at 1775 Street Road, meets and exceeds each of these criteria.

Formed in 2001, HealthLink was originally a medical and dental center, offering free services in both areas. But when numerous other

free medical clinics began popping up in the area, HealthLink representatives made the decision in 2015 to focus exclusively on dental care, something no other local organization specialized in.

According to Raquel Braemer, development director at HealthLink Dental, all services—from basic exams to root canals—are performed free of charge. To be eligible, a patient must be at least 18 years old, be employed or married/have a domestic partner who is employed, reside in Bucks or Montgomery county and have a household income at or below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The employment requirement is waived for veterans.

In 2016, 1,779 of these eligible individuals received dental care at HealthLink, a 34 percent increase from its first year as a specialty clinic. Last year, 2,004 local adults were treated, with their appointments totalling \$760,980. The patients didn't have to spend a dime.

Since HealthLink is a standalone clinic that's not associated with a hospital or health system, it doesn't receive any sort of federal or state funding. Therefore, it relies solely on fundraising efforts and awards from generous donors such as Dominion Energy, which has supported the clinic for three consecutive years.

“While many of us look forward to the new year, we recognize that many people in our communities struggle to afford the basics needed for a secure, healthy and productive life,” said Hunter A. Applewhite, president of Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation. “These grants will help fill critical needs for nutritious food, safe shelter and the medical care essential for a better future.”

The \$5,000 awarded to HealthLink will be primarily put toward its “Connecting Oral Health and Overall Health” program. As its name suggests, the initiative was created to educate community members on how their oral health can affect their overall health, and vice versa.

Braemer explained that often those who consider themselves “healthy” don't regularly visit the doctor and therefore aren't screened for things such as diabetes and high blood pressure. These tests can also be costly for low-income individuals without insurance.

As part of HealthLink's program, all new patients are screened for both of these at their first appointments and referred to free, local medical

clinics for follow-up care if necessary.

“We try to empower them to take better care of themselves,” Braemer said. “The need is out there.”

“Connecting Oral Health and Overall Health” is all about prevention and education. According to Braemer, people with gum disease are twice as likely as others to die from a heart attack and three times as likely to have a stroke. Meanwhile, if a diabetic’s blood glucose levels are poorly controlled—which is usually the case for those unaware they have the disease—there is a higher chance of developing serious gum disease and losing teeth, among other oral problems.

The dedicated staff at HealthLink helps patients determine whether they have, or are at risk for, any of these health concerns without breaking (or even stepping foot in) the bank.

In addition to exams and education, the clinic provides on-site cleanings, deep scaling, X-rays, fillings, simple extractions, root canals performed by Temple University Kornberg School of Dentistry students, and oral screenings.

HealthLink Dental is open five days a week with evening availability on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Appointments are available. For more information and to fill out an eligibility form, visit healthlinkdental.org. ••

Samantha Bambino can be reached at sbambino@newspapermediagroup.com

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The advertisement features a photograph of two women in a medical setting. One woman, wearing a white lab coat, is standing and looking at a computer monitor. The other woman, wearing purple scrubs, is sitting at a desk and typing on a keyboard. The background shows a modern medical office with large windows and a staircase.