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Proposal 5: Organizing a Cyclical Charity Clinic

Related Strategy

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Background

Three years ago, a dental association in a nearby state began holding a charity dental event in their county civic center. The strong response by patients and providers has resulted in the formalization of an annual event organized by a designated state dental association staff member. At their last event, three days of free services were provided for 1200 patients by 300 volunteer dentists and auxiliaries. Treatment services have also expanded to include cleanings, digital radiographs, oral biopsies, root canal treatments, fluoride varnishes, and a limited number of full and partial dentures. The event is wildly popular with patients. Some patients return each year for routine care, although the majority of them seek emergency treatment for problems that have been painful for months. So many dental providers have asked to participate that the charity event has now “spun off” of a number of smaller, shorter events in other locations. Leadership in the NOSDA has proposed a similar event for Springdale County.

Proposed action

NOSDA will partner with partner with the NO State department of health and local businesses and public officials in Springdale County, to hold a 3 day “Love Your Smile” dental event at the Springdale County Fairgrounds. It is estimated that about 150 full and part-time volunteers will be needed for the event, including 50 dentists/dental hygienists and dental students from NOCOD and NOSDA. Dental services will be limited to diagnosis, preventive care, simple restorative, and non-surgical dental extractions. 600 dental patients are expected to be served over the three days.

Anticipated cost

Costs include \$140,000 for two years’ salary plus benefits for a full-time staff member at NOSDA, who would be responsible for coordinating the annual event and raising funds, including their own salary, by the conclusion of the grant support. An additional \$185,000 will be used for dental equipment and supplies, purchased at cost from dental supply companies, facilities, communications, and marketing. \$75,000 will be used to provide limited transportation, lodging, and amenities for personnel including on-site meals for event volunteers, an annual planning retreat for a core team of NODA members who take leadership roles on the event, storage of equipment and supplies, and electronic dental records for patients who utilize services each year. Cost to hold the event in year 2 will be approximately \$50,000. NOSDA leadership is confident in their ability to fund-raise for future events and has hopes to expand size of event and breadth of provided services in future years.

Budget: \$525,000

| Description | Year 1 Cost | Year 2 Cost | Ongoing Cost |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Mobile dentistry van | \$200,000 | \$ - | \$ - |
| Staff salaries & benefits | \$200,000 | \$200,000 | \$200,000 |
| Operating expenses | \$50,000 | \$50,000 | \$50,000 |
| Total | \$450,000 | \$250,000 | \$250,000 |



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What is a cyclical charity clinic?

A charity clinic, generally, is a clinic that provides free dental services for patients who need dental care but lack access. Typically, patients are adults who due to their age are caught in a “gap” in the dental safety net: they are too old for children’s Medicaid, too young for programs aimed at older adults, and in need of more care than the limited services that adult Medicaid covers. Charity clinics may be as expansive as a multi-day “fair” that takes place in an a permanent or temporary structure, such as a school, civic center, parking lot, or fairgrounds; they may also be as limited as a dedicated half-day of volunteering at a solo dental practice. Services provided at charity clinics tend to be limited and oriented toward basic dental care: cleanings and examinations, fillings, and extractions. Some charity clinics also provide limited restorative work, minor dental surgeries, denture making and denture repair, and referrals to local dentists who have committed to provide follow-up care to the patient for free, a sliding scale fee, or very low interest payment plans. Generally, larger charity clinics are sponsored by and/or subsidized through a variety of sources: dental supply companies, private practice and corporate dentists, dental insurers, colleges of dentistry, and a variety of individuals and organizations who provide organizational and administrative support to do fundraising, publicity, set-up and take-down, and numerous other tasks.

A cyclical charity clinic is a charity clinic that provides dental services to patients in need on a regularly-scheduled basis, typically annually, quarterly, or monthly. While cyclical charity clinics are not intended to replace other, more sustainable dental care options such as private dentistry or continually operational safety net provisions, organizers tend to orient toward providing services in as ongoing a basis as possible until the dental care access crisis is resolved.

How does a cyclical charity clinic work?

A cyclical charity clinic is usually organized by a professional, charitable, medical or dental care, or religious organization. The components required scale to the size and duration of the event. For example, a private practice dentist who decides to dedicate one day per month to treating underserved members of her community may only need to make small decisions related to her practice such as how to identify and limit patients to her capacity, whether to pay staff or ask them to volunteer alongside her, and how to handle follow up care required. Larger events, for example a biannual three-day “pop up” clinic, require more extensive preparation. Depending on the size of the event, organizers may need to do the following:

- Develop plans together with community stakeholders in order to foster good will, gain community buy-in, and take advantage of local assets and relationships
- Secure a donated space where the event will be held
- Identify co-sponsoring organizations to help plan the event
- Raise funds and gather donations for supplies and operations
- Develop clinic protocol, often with a volunteer clinic director
- Work with the state practice board to negotiate temporary changes to practice law, for example to enable a provider with an out-of-state license to provide temporary volunteer services
- Recruit licensed clinicians and other volunteer staff and ensure for their provisions (e.g. meals during breaks in operations)
- Publicize, set up, operate, and dismantle the clinic
- Facilitate quality control and data collection processes, including post-facto meetings to refine processes for future clinics.

What are some things to consider about organizing a cyclical charity clinic?

In general, organizing a small, private practice based cyclical clinic requires negotiating social relations, namely convincing the dentist(s) to participate. This may be as simple as educating them on the benefits of providing limited free care including community goodwill and tax write-off incentives, or as complex as organizing a network of peer mentorship and support in order to make charity care a social norm. Organizing a large cyclical charity clinics



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require an immense dedication of organizational and personal resources, as well as community participation and support. There are many things to consider when deciding whether and how to organize a large cyclical charity clinic, from the practical to the philosophical. For example:

- Will you combine the charity dental clinic with a charity medical clinic? If so, what logistics do you need to work out? If not, what is your protocol for medical emergencies? How will you handle pharmacy services?
- Does the community have a location that will work for the event not only in terms of size (e.g. a city park ball field, a church with a large interior) but also in terms of parking for patients who have vehicles and access to public transit for patients who don't?
- How will you select a day or series of days to hold the event, taking into consideration holidays, anticipated weather forecast, professional events, and local events such as the local high school homecoming football game?
- Do you have a realistic sense of expectation in terms of the scale, scope, location, frequency, and sustainability of the clinic?
- How will you cultivate relationships with and respond to the needs of the community at large in order to gain their trust and support?
- How will you pose this event to local dentists who may feel threatened by it or pressured to participate, in order to maintain good professional relations?

What are some examples where a cyclical charity clinic has worked before?

There are a number of examples of cyclical charity dental events that take place throughout the United States. Some examples include:

- <http://www.adcfmom.org>
- <http://www.ramusa.org/services/dental.htm>
- <http://www.dentistryfromtheheart.org/>



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