

SIUE SDM celebrates National Children's Dental Health Month

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) is hosting nearly 300 local children throughout February in honor of National Children's Dental Health Month.

Every Monday and Friday, third-year students lead educational activities centered on proper hygiene and diet, while fourth-year students conduct screenings under the supervision of licensed dental faculty.

The SIU SDM is welcoming 268 kindergarten and second grade students from Roxana South Primary School, and another 19 children from Saints Peter and Paul School. All those with signed consent forms receive screenings, an important, non-invasive check of the teeth for the benefit of the students and their guardians.

“This community offering is an opportunity for us to educate children on basic oral principles, and identify any issues going on with their teeth that parents need to be aware of,” said Katie Kosten, DMD, assistant professor and director of community dentistry. “For our dental students, it’s a great opportunity for them to practice their clinical skills, build rapport and service the community in a meaningful way.”

“Look at those pearly whites,” a fourth-year student cheerily said to a patient during her screening. “How many teeth do you think you have? 10? 100?”

“The mouth is a reflection of the health of the rest of the body,” said fourth-year student Michael Hawk, of Edwardsville. “Catching any issues early on is important, as is helping kids establish healthy habits.”

Hawk will graduate in June 2019 with plans to practice pediatric dentistry. He notes how students are trained to use age-appropriate language with pediatric patients, so their initial visits to the dentist are positive.

“I love working with kids,” Hawk said. “It’s a population that can be a bit challenging in dentistry, but that has a really strong need for quality care. I appreciate the huge positive change dentists can make in their lives.”

The interactive educational activities led by third-year students included practicing brushing and flossing friendly animal characters, creating an alginate hand mold, identifying good and bad foods for teeth, and spinning a colorful question and answer wheel.

“This is a great age to work with, because they love to learn, and they love the interactive activities,” said third-year student Alexis Polczynski, of Okawville. “Each of these activities help them learn about the things that make going to the dentist fun!”

The SIU School of Dental Medicine students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people

annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.