



Thursday Memo – May 22, 2014

I often ask students whom I work with to write something reflective about their experience. This past month I had a student, Alli Regan, UMMS IV doing her oral health elective. She had the opportunity to work alongside the dental hygienist on the UMass Care Mobile among her other placements. She had an opportunity to witness a re-connection to the health care system that was unexpected. While doing so, she also learned the nuances of making people feel comfortable no matter what background they are coming from. No doubt these lessons will serve her well as she heads off to her Internal Medicine residency at Baystate next month.

You can reply to Alli at alliam.ortiz@umassmed.edu or to the list serve in general. Enjoy!

Turning over a new leaf

When “Sonia” first walked into the UMass Care Mobile she did not anticipate that she would be visiting the dental hygienist. Instead she had an appointment with the nurse practitioner at the other end of the bus for a pre-employment physical. However she had to wait in line to see her, whereas the dental hygienist, Jamie, had an empty chair and offered Sonia a dental assessment and cleaning.

“Do I have to pay?” She asked. She was reassured that the service was free to patients without insurance. Her next statement was one I had heard before from patients who were afraid of disappointing their health care providers. “Oh no, I haven’t visited a dentist since I was six. Things might look really bad in there.” Again, she was reassured that we were not there to judge, just to help get her started on establishing dental care and referring her to a dentist.

As she slipped into the chair she chatted nervously about her situation. “I moved from out west this past year and had recently found a job. I have a friend here who I have been staying with.”

Jamie took this opportunity to have Sonia elaborate on her social history and asked Sonia if she used any illicit substances. Sonia hesitated before answering, “No.”

“Have you *ever* used drugs in the past, like pot?” she asked again, nonchalantly.

“Well, I use pot sometimes to take the edge off...not every day though. I used to use Meth.”

“When did you last use Meth?”

“I am 6 months clean. I haven’t used it since coming here. I’m glad that I gave it up and besides it is harder to get here”, Sonia explained. Jamie just nodded her head as she draped Sonia. I nervously looked at Jamie and copied her cool composure and managed to mask my shocked facial expression. As Jamie readied her tools I took the chance to study Sonia more closely. She was dressed in baggy jeans, a hoodie, and her hair was held back in a tight pony tail. Her eyes met mine and I smiled. “That’s great news about giving up meth - keep it up!” She smiled in return.

“Okay- open up and let’s take a look.” Jamie inspected Sonia’s dentition with her tools while explaining to me what she was doing. “It is common to get small cavities in these areas.”, she stated as she pointed in between her teeth. After she was done she gave Sonia a break and explained to her. “You have 2 small cavities, but overall everything looks pretty good.”

Sonia looked relieved and stated she thought she might have *meth mouth*. “There is some pretty nasty stuff in my mouth... I didn’t want to know how bad it was...”, Sonia started. Jamie nodded but again reassured Sonia. Jamie continued with the cleaning. At the end of the cleaning Sonia was given information on the next steps to restorative care and counseled by the coordinator to ensure she would be covered by Medicaid. I was surprised by Sonia’s story and couldn’t imagine another way that she would have re-established her dental care without the Care Mobile.