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Agency of Human Services

October 7, 2013

Mr. Vaughn Collins
Executive Director
Vermont State Dental Society
1 Kennedy Drive, Suite L-3
South Burlington, VT 05403

Dear Vaughn:

I'm writing this letter for two reasons, first, to thank Vermont Dentists for the great work that is performed for Vermonters through our public health programs, and secondly, to discuss some upcoming challenges and opportunities for Vermont's dental health care delivery system.

Thank you for the care you provide to Vermonters, especially to those covered through Medicaid. Approximately 170,000 Vermonters are enrolled in Medicaid with roughly 111,000 entitled to a dental benefit; 69,000 children, and 42,000 adults. Of those with a benefit, 61% of children and 32% of adults receive dental care. Private dental practices provide 80% of that care. Vermont's rate for children's access to dental care ranks in the top 5 states of the nation. Vermont's success in this arena is supported by the commitment of your members to provide care to Medicaid beneficiaries.

I also want to take a moment to point out the positive results of a recent consumer experience of care survey¹ for Medicaid children. The report indicated that:

- 72% of parents reported that their child received dental care.
- Of children who received dental care, 92% reported their child 'usually' or 'always' got a dental appointment as soon as they thought their child needed.
- When asked to rank their child's dental care, 87% ranked the quality of care as 8 or better on a scale of 0-10 where ten is the best care possible.

These rates compare well to primary care and other specialty care. A high percentage of Medicaid children are accessing dental care when they need it, and the perception of quality is high.

The Vermont State Dental Society also deserves credit for changes implemented in dental coverage for pregnant women through Medicaid last year. We are aware of the challenges faced in providing dental coverage to all of those in public programs. The addition of coverage to pregnant women is a significant step forward and the VSDS played a key role in advocating for that change. Thank you for making our system work. We are very grateful.

¹ The Consumer Experience of Care Survey is conducted by an independent and CAHPS certified vendor.



I also want to take a moment to discuss upcoming changes for Vermont's dental health care delivery system. Because of changes required through the Federal Affordable Care Act, 38,000 adults currently covered under VHAP and Catamount will experience a transition in coverage. Starting in January, 28,000 individuals will be newly eligible for dental benefits through Medicaid and 10,000 more will transition into a qualified health plan (QHP) where they can purchase supplemental dental benefits through Vermont Health Connect.

This is not new information. As we started looking into this transition last December we took an important step to survey Vermont dentists. We sought to learn if and under what circumstances dental providers would consider expanding their practice to serve more individuals through Medicaid.

Respondents indicated the following:

- 33% were interested in expanding their practice but saw barriers.
- 55% indicated they were interested in serving more Medicaid beneficiaries if some issues were addressed.
- The three biggest factors that limit taking on more Medicaid patients are:
 - Low reimbursement rates,
 - Missed or canceled appointments, and
 - The \$495 annual adult cap.

The DVHA is taking steps to address these concerns. Some steps are actionable in the short term; others require deliberation and a long view towards the future. In the short term, dental fees will increase effective 11/1/2013 as part of the Governor's proposal to provide an annual inflation increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates. The DVHA worked closely with the VSIDS on how best to implement this rate change and we believe it is a positive step in the right direction.

I would like to work with the VSIDS to better understand the problem of canceled or missed appointments. We would welcome the opportunity to look at any existing data, identify best practice, and develop strategies to reduce the high rate of no show appointments. It is my hope to identify some approaches that help mitigate this problem without placing unnecessary burdens on Vermonters enrolled in Medicaid.

I also welcome conversation about the current \$495 cap on dental benefits. I am particularly interested in making sure that Vermonters on Medicaid don't see an erosion of their benefit because of our increase in provider reimbursement. Obviously, any approach to changing the cap requires budgetary consideration and legislative approval. We are currently problem solving around this barrier and hope to be able to provide some promising alternatives in the future.

The DVHA is committed to creating the best system of dental care that we can. We know that you are also committed to excellence and the DVHA is incredibly grateful for that fact. We are thankful for your history of service to Medicaid beneficiaries and we hope you will continue to work with us to meet the challenges and opportunities as we continue down this road.

Sincerely,



Mark Larson
Commissioner