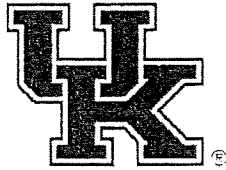


8-8-2023 ARRS
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August 2, 2023

Senator Steve West, ARRS Committee Co-Chair
Representative Derek Lewis, ARRS Committee Co-Chair
702 Capital Avenue
3rd Floor Annex
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Dear Senator West and Representative Lewis,

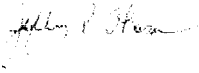
As dean of the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry, I would like to provide you with some thoughts regarding the importance of providing Medicaid services to the citizens of Kentucky. It is well documented that the oral health status of our Kentucky citizens is some of the poorest in the United States. It is also well documented that poor oral health not only produces oral diseases, but also influences many systemic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Kentucky also leads the country in oropharyngeal cancer. Our adult population has one of the highest rates of the edentulism in the country. Not only does this greatly influence the patients' ability to eat a normal diet, but it also makes it very difficult for them to gain employment. Individuals with no teeth in our state have been deprived of dentures primarily because of expense.

The University of Kentucky is a land grant university, and the College of Dentistry has a longstanding mission to care for the dental health of the rural citizens of our state. Providing increased access to dental care for the Medicaid population was a great step forward, not only in decreasing oral and systemic diseases, but also by offering dentures for the most in need. Our College of Dentistry had already developed plans to provide more dental care, including dentures, to the citizens of Kentucky. If these services are not included in Medicaid services, our state will continue to lead the country in dental diseases, edentulism and oral cancer. This is certainly not the best outcome for the citizens of Kentucky.

Confounding this access to care issue is that fact that Medicaid reimbursement rates for managing these patients are far below the national average and even below most of our adjacent states. Also, the dental rates paid by the MCOs are often below the Medicaid fee schedule with lax enforcement of network adequacy rules. Add to this is the MCOs excessive restrictive prior authorization requirements. All these facts make it difficult for dentists to participate in Medicaid. With these reimbursement rate issues, most dentists have been forced to vacate the Medicaid program, leaving many patients with no option for care. The University of Kentucky College of Dentistry and the University of Louisville School of Dentistry are attempting to absorb the enormous demand but cannot due to the increased number of patients and the distance patients must travel to our treatment sites. The University of Kentucky College of Dentistry has three remote sites for Medicaid patients, but the poor reimbursement rates make it difficult to sustain these clinics. It is my belief that an increase in Medicaid benefits for adults has also motivated the MCOs to increase reimbursement rates. An increase of Medicaid services would be one of the most significant advancements to improve dental health in our state in many years.

Senator West and Representative Lewis. I ask that you consider the wide-reaching outcome of increasing Medicaid benefits in our state. I plan to attend the reference committee meeting scheduled at 1:00 PM on Tuesday August 8, 2023, in Frankfort. If I can provide an additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,



Jeffrey P Okeson
Professor and Dean
University of Kentucky College of Dentistry

CC:

Rep. Derek Lewis
Emily Harkenrider
Emily Caudill