

UAMS NEWS RELEASE

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has established a Center for Dental Education that will include an oral health clinic and postgraduate programs for dentists in advanced general dentistry and oral surgery.

The oral health clinic, expected to begin accepting patients in early 2013, will occupy about 3,000 square feet that is being renovated adjacent to the UAMS Dental Hygiene Clinic and will share additional facilities with that clinic.

In addition, the center will collaborate with the Arkansas State Dental Association to develop continuing education opportunities for practicing dentists in the state.

“UAMS is committed to improving health and health care in Arkansas, which includes developing new programs like our Center for Dental Education,” said UAMS Chancellor Dan Rahn, M.D. “Access to adequate dental care in Arkansas is a health care problem that has far reaching effects on the health of Arkansans.”

Charles O. Cranford, D.D.S., is director of the new Center for Dental Education, which will be in the UAMS College of Health Professions that already includes the dental hygiene program. Keith David Stillwell, D.D.S., who has been associate director of General Practice Residency at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, has been named director of the clinical program and will arrive in September.

Oral health clinic will open initially with five treatment rooms. Cranford said the center will add another dentist, who along with Stillwell will see patients when the oral health clinic opens.

Arkansas needs more dental health care — particularly in school-aged children and in low-income populations, according to a 2008 report to the state Legislature by a committee chaired by Cranford. In a 2003 study of more than 7,000 third-grade students in public schools, more than 60 percent had evidence of current or past cavities and 31 percent had untreated cavities.

A 2011 study from the Pew Charitable Trusts noted that children who lack dental care miss more school days, use more expensive emergency room services for care and face worse job prospects than those who do receive regular dental care.

Cranford came to UAMS in 1985 to serve as director of the UAMS Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) program. He was later appointed as the first vice chancellor for Regional Programs at UAMS, which encompasses the network of AHECs as well as health education and continuing education programs across the state.

Since 2007 he has continued part time as a faculty member and was appointed by UAMS Chancellor Dan Rahn, M.D., as special assistant for dental education initiatives that led to creation of the new center. Cranford received his dental degree in 1958 from the University of Tennessee School of Dentistry.

Stillwell received his dental degree in 1983 from the Louisiana State University School of Dentistry. He completed a general practice dental residency at the University of Colorado Health Science Center. In 1979, he received a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Lyon College in Batesville.

Stillwell will lead the effort to secure accreditation from the Commission on Dental Accreditation for a general practice residency at UAMS and will serve as director of the residency program. The goal is for the center to begin accepting dental residents in 2014. By then, the oral health clinic is expected to expand to include about 15 treatment rooms.

In the 2008 report to the state House and Senate Interim Committees on Public Health, Welfare and Labor, Arkansas had 1,331 licensed dentists and ranked 50th in the nation for the ratio of dentists per 100,000 population. More than half of the dentists in the state are age 50 or older, meaning that within the next 10 years, half of the existing dental workforce will reach or be nearing retirement age.

“We need more dentists in Arkansas and establishing a postgraduate residency program in the state will increase the number of dentists beginning their careers in the state,” said Cranford, comparing it to a medical residency where many physicians often will remain in the area where they completed their residency. “Our overall goal is to try to get more dentists into underserved areas around the state.”

Cranford said he envisions dental residents being able to complete rotations at clinics, hospitals or AHEC sites around the state.

The Center for Dental Education and its residency program could serve as a foundation for an eventual dental college at UAMS, Cranford said. Arkansas is one of only three states in the nation with a population of more than 2.5 million that does not have a college of dentistry.

UAMS is the state's only comprehensive academic health center, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a statewide network of regional centers; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the Myeloma Institute for Research and Therapy, the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, the Psychiatric Research Institute, the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and the Translational Research Institute. Named best Little Rock metropolitan area hospital by U.S. News & World Report, it is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has more than 2,800 students and 775 medical residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including about 1,000 physicians and other professionals who provide care to patients at UAMS, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and UAMS' Area Health Education Centers throughout the state. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com.