

My Visit to the Oasis Dental Clinic, Bath

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“Haven”, “sanctuary,” “safe harbor,” “refuge”...that’s how Webster’s defines the word *oasis* and the Oasis Dental Clinic in Bath is that and more to the patients seen by the dentists who serve there twice a month.

The dental clinic was started 3 years ago by members of the Merry Meeting Dental Society in the Bath, Brunswick area. Dr. Jack Bauman heads it up and more than 16 dentists provide a rotating shift of two dentists and their assistants each clinic night so about every four months the volunteers go to the clinic after their regular work day is over.

The Oasis Clinic treats “working poor” adults who don’t meet the income guidelines but who are struggling to make ends meet with low wage jobs.

The dental clinic is held at the Jesse Albert Memorial Dental Center on the first and third Monday nights each month from six until nine in the evening. Clinic patients are actually screened and referred to the program by staff at the Oasis Medical Clinic in Brunswick at 66 Baribeau Drive. As a result the waiting area is filled with patients when the dentists arrive at 6 PM, ready for another 3 hours of delivering dental treatment.

I visited the clinic on Sept. 24. Drs. Kathleen Winn and Rick Elsaesser were “on duty” that night, with Dr. Bauman manning the intake and paperwork. They saw 7 patients, two of whom discussed their treatments with me.

One patient was a slim young blond woman of about 20 who works at a low wage job in the Bath area. As a result of numerous cavities she had a great deal of pain but was not able to afford treatment. Dr. Winn did a very deep composite restoration on one front tooth and re-appointed her for the next clinic night for further work on the woman’s mouth.

The other was a man of 52 who looked older than his years. He was in similarly dire financial straits having just returned to Maine after living in California for many years. He was scheduled to start a new job at a local printing plant that night and had been referred to Oasis after a molar had become abscessed. He visited Oasis because he didn’t have a dentist and was not covered by MaineCare. Dr. Bauman worked him into a busy schedule that night so he could go to the first night of his new job. Dr. Elsaesser saw this patient and, after administering the blocks required in the

patient’s mouth, told him you “might hear some sharp cracking noises, but don’t worry, that’s normal.” Next Dr. Elsaesser split the offending tooth and removed it in pieces. A few minutes later, after a thank you and a firm hand shake, the gentleman headed off to his first night’s work in Bath.

Jack Bauman is a recently retired dentist from the Brunswick area. He is the jack of all trades for Oasis Dental. He and Jan McIntosh, one of the Jesse Albert Clinic dental assistants, manage the ebb and flow of patients. Jack is also on the Oasis Board and keeps track of the financial transactions that document how much care is given each night for the inevitable grant report he has to write each year. He also provides that information to the Jesse Albert board to justify the use of their facilities. For example, by September of this year the Oasis Clinic had completed about \$50,000 worth of free dental care for the working poor in the Merry Meeting area, some \$20,000 more than was provided the year before.

But Jack’s work isn’t done when his financial reports are finished. On clinic evenings he has two more jobs as the Oasis receptionist and the “Team Cook.” As receptionist he welcomes patients into the clinic, takes their names, creates a fresh dental record for each and manages traffic to the operatories. Later, when the dentists and assistants take a well earned break for a bite to eat, Jack exercises his culinary skills by calling an order in to the local Pizzeria.

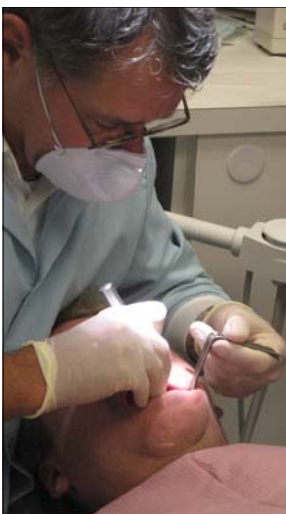
Sarah Bourgion and Ellen Pelletier are dental assistants who work side by side with Dr. Winn and Dr. Elsaesser. They are just as engaged as the dentists in helping each patient as they prepare the operatory, assist the dentist, answer questions from the patients and make them feel as comfortable as possible in a strange setting. The dental assistants, just like the dentists, gave of their time freely and it’s clear that helping others is all the pay they are looking for.

The incident that most touched me was when the young woman who had been helped by Dr. Winn came into the office and said “Pardon me Dr. Bauman, I’d like to give the clinic something for helping me. I know it’s not much but it’s what I can afford right now”. She handed him a ten dollar bill and thanked all the staff for their help that night.

She was wrong, though. It was enough. She had paid her bill in full with that heartfelt thank you.



Dr. Kathleen Winn treats a patient at the Oasis Clinic in Bath.



Dr. Rick Elsaesser works on one of seven patients seen on a Monday night.