

PRESS RELEASE

July 15, 2003

**MASON COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
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TO: KMAS, KRXV, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN,
SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL,
THE SUN

Re: Mason County Department of Health Services Co-Recipient of 2003 Heroes of
Health Care Award

The Washington Health Foundation has given its prestigious 2003 "Heroes of Health Care" award to several local Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) programs including the program in Mason County. Currently this award-winning program is operating in fourteen counties statewide.

The ABCD programs receive initial financial support from Washington Dental Service Foundation. These partnerships include local dental societies, the state Medicaid program, local health agencies, and the University of Washington School of Dentistry. Aimed at children up to age six, the programs stress intensive case management to ensure the families make and keep appointments. They have also convinced more dentists to take Medicaid insured children, another important factor in increasing children's access to oral health services.

The award was presented at the Washington Health Foundation's annual awards banquet on Thursday, June 19, 2003. "We know that connecting the health care that we provide to the body with the health care we provide to the mouth is one of the many important opportunities to improve health into the future," said Greg Vigdor, president and CEO of the Washington Health Foundation. "The collaborative work of the ABCD programs across the public and private sectors is a heroic endeavor to pursue these possibilities. The focus of these efforts for the benefit of our children is even more impressive." By winning the Heroes award, the ABCD programs join a distinguished list of individuals and organizations honored for working collaboratively to enhance community care and quality of life.

The WDS Foundation provides three years of funding to get ABCD programs launched and ongoing technical assistance to help evaluate and promote the program. Five additional counties are in the process of establishing new ABCD programs.

Mason County Department of Health Services partnered 2 ½ years ago with Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department along with the Thurston/Mason Dental Society to establish the ABCD program in Thurston and Mason County. "Since 2000 we have enrolled 811 Mason County children in the ABCD program. These are children ranging in age from infant through age five who most likely would not have received any dental services at all prior to the ABCD program. Our heartfelt thanks go to

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the five participating dentists in Mason County; Dr. Shirley Daniels, Dr. Patrick Kwong, Dr. Duane Moore, Dr. Brian Oleson, and Dr Christine Pace,” says Mary Dussol, Health Educator for Mason County Department of Health Services.

Early results show success in several ABCD communities. First and foremost, more children are receiving oral health care, even though the number of dentists in their hometowns is not increasing. The growth is highest among children up to age two. The ABCD program has also convinced more dentists to take Medicaid children, another important factor in increasing children’s access to oral health services. One of the Thurston/Mason ABCD coalition members, Harold C. “Duke” Watson, Jr, DDS, PS, a Thurston county provider said, “I’ve made some significant changes in the way I run my practice because of my participation in the ABCD program. I had always been a little hesitant to accept young children as patients. The ABCD training program gave me new insight into management, patient education and treatment of all children, especially the very young.”

“Enrolling children into the ABCD program is done by Mason County Department of Health services staff and would not occur if staff are not dedicated to the program. Currently we have utilized the grant from WDS Foundation to enable Mary Dussol to spend about two days a week enrolling children into the ABCD program. This program will not continue in Mason County without resources to fund this position. Alternative funding sources are being explored to enable us to continue the program,” says Steve Kutz, Health Services Director for Mason County.

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Ron Henrickson, Mason County Administrator