

Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic

Stories of heroism, gratitude and generosity during uncertain times

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

In late February, the Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic was in the midst of planning dental education programs for local students and setting the date for our annual Spring Cleaning, a dental hygiene event held each April. All the while, Clinic leadership was closely monitoring the first occurrences of COVID-19 cases in our nation. By mid-March, COVID-19 had become a pandemic, and our community—along with the rest of our state and nation—shut down.

At that time, our team at the Clinic collectively decided to do everything possible to take care of our patients. Our choices would not be based on fear, but rather out of concern and compassion: if we don't take care of our patients, they will end up in an emergency room, and, most likely receive only a temporary solution to alleviate dental pain. All staff members were given a choice to be part of the **COVID-19 Hero Team**—all are bravely choosing to serve. Our mission has always been about providing access to dental care. Why would we limit access now?

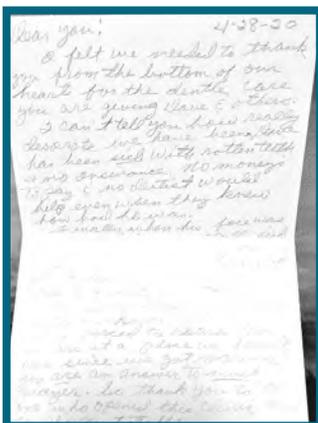
To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our WNC mountain communities and to continue seeing patients, the Clinic began serving dental emergencies only as of March 13, 2020. Restorative filling and preventative cleanings were postponed at that time; doing so allows us to treat urgent dental needs and alleviate the burden that dental emergencies place on our hospitals.

Since March 13th, our COVID-19 Heroes have:

- ▶ Treated 207 patient visits
- ▶ Performed 735 procedures including 339 extractions and 11 fillings
- ▶ Conducted 61 teledentistry conferences

The value of these services is \$116,983 and, just as in "normal" times, we are proud to provide these critical services at **no cost to the patient**.

Our Heroes: Dr. Michelle McDonald, Staff Dentist; Michele Coward, Clinical Director; Dawn Ferrin, Dental Assistant; Col. Robert Cahill, Reception and Triage, Jonah Caplinger, Dental Assistant; and, Donna Freeman, Office Assistant and Triage.



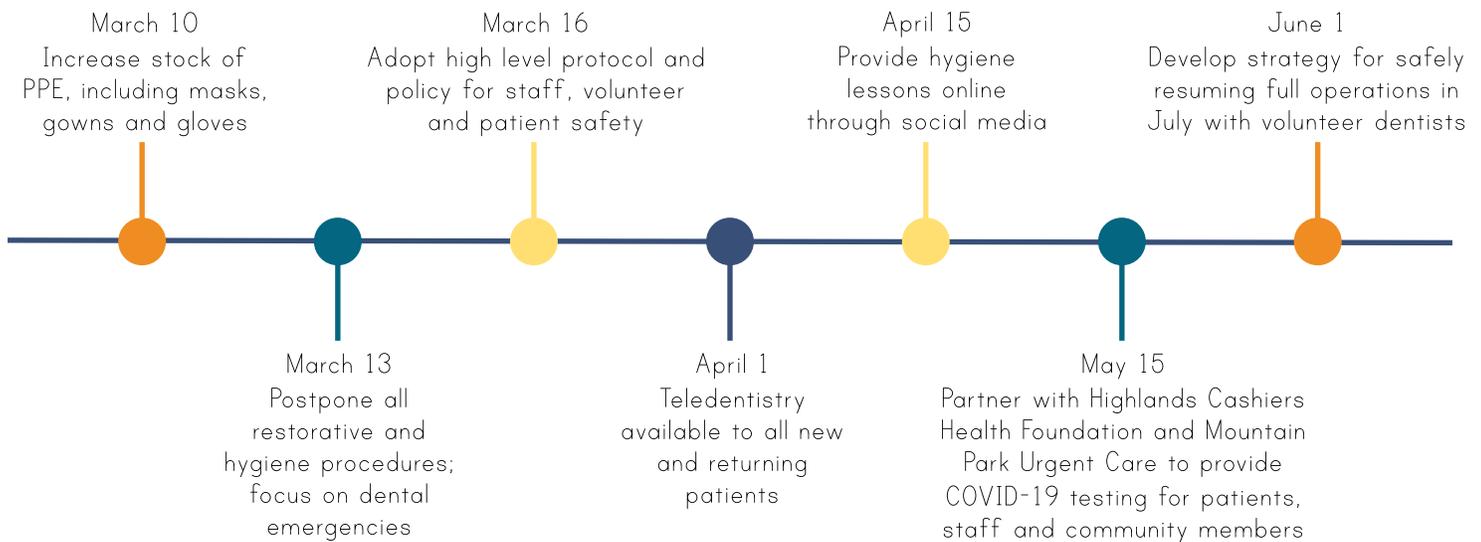
THERE ARE NO STATISTICS THAT MEASURE THE WARMTH OF A SMILE!

The Clinic frequently receives notes of gratitude from our patients. We have been overwhelmed with gratitude over the last four months. Read a small sampling of words from our patients who are smiling again.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts... We always had good teeth and dental insurance until we were forced to retire... You are an answer to much prayer... I don't have dental insurance... My jaw was completely swollen and the swelling was moving down the side of my neck... They are the nicest, most professional folks I've ever encountered... We are very VERY fortunate to have such professional and caring folks in our community.

HOPE FOR THE BEST. PLAN FOR THE WORST.

A timeline of the actions the Free Dental Clinic took to ensure the safety of its staff, patients and community.



GETTING BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

The Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic is so fortunate to have friends like these!

The **Clinic's Board of Directors**, who have provided inspiring leadership and keen financial planning to remain stable and remain open for people in need.

Our **Loyal Clinic Donors**, who have contributed over \$25,000 since March to assist with PPE, safety equipment and critical personnel expenses. Without safety measures, part-time staff and our vital staff dentist we would have been forced to closed, decreasing access to emergency dental care for hundreds of patients.

Community Care Clinic of Highlands, Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, Dogwood Foundation, Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation, National Association of Free Clinics, North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, WNC Bridge Foundation, and The Village Green, who stepped up to provide funding, PPE including N95 masks and gloves, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies, and even snacks for our team of dental heroes!

READY TO SERVE

A Message from Melanie D. Jones, Executive Director

These have not been normal times. We have all been asked to respond to a crisis as if every individual effort we make contributes to a collective outcome that **saves lives and speeds us toward a return to normalcy**. We have been asked to do things that we've never done before—often things we don't want to do. As the Clinic and our community move forward, we will do so with compassion for the people around us and with a clear sense that our actions are consequential. With an understanding that we may not know the dimensions of the challenges before us, we must proceed with a calm resolve not to underestimate these challenges. We will not panic, but neither will we fail to prepare.

At the Clinic, we have **prepared** and we are **ready to move forward**. With strict protocols for the safety of our staff, volunteers and patients, we are ready to welcome back our 13 volunteer dentists and our patients who remain in need of restorative care, crowns and dentures. We are ready to provide dental education to our schools in creative and engaging ways. We are ready to continue our focus on the prevention of dental disease.

Thanks to the support of our community leaders, donors, foundations, hero staff and volunteers, we are ready to continue **restoring lives, one tooth at a time**.

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