USC School of Dentistry joins family dental fair

Hundreds of children and their families took advantage of free oral screenings that were provided by the USC School of Dentistry faculty and dental students late last summer.

In addition, the children participated in games, received a free book and visited with the tooth fairy.

Parents preparing their children for the first day of school need to add another box to their checklist of pencil, crayons and glue. California legislators approved AB 1453 last year. The state law, which took effect in January, now makes a dental check-up part of the health requirements for children entering elementary school in kindergarten or the first grade.

The Fair at the USC School of Dentistry addresses AB 1453 and helps local families establish a dental home for their children.

Said Hal Slavkin, Dean of the USC School of Dentistry: “The goal of the legislation and of the on-campus event is to encourage families of young children to establish a dental home and an ongoing relationship with a local dental provider hopefully leading to a foundation of lifelong good oral health.”

“We want our community partners to realize that we at USC are a resource for the community and can become a dental home for the community children,” he added.

National studies have also found that school age children age five to 17 miss nearly 2 million school days each year nationwide.

“Dental disease, as we know, is a serious health issue in this state and there is growing awareness that it impedes a child’s ability to develop and learn,” said Roseann Mulligan, Associate Dean of USC’s School of Dentistry Community Health Programs.

The California Dental Association sponsored the bill. Supporters contend it is an important step in targeting a major but silent epidemic plaguing California’s children.

A study released last year by the Dental Health Foundation found that dental disease outpaces asthma, childhood diabetes and even obesity as the state’s primary health problem affecting children.

Jennifer Holtzman, a USCSD faculty member and director of the school’s Neighborhood Mobile Clinic, worked with other members of the CDA in creating the grassroots effort that lead to the CDA championing this effort.

“The program will identify the children who need more dental treatment and will also identify barriers to receiving care,” Holtzman added. “We need to have data. You can’t work to address a problem without knowing what the extent of the problem is.”

The California law follows similar legislation recently passed in Illinois. States such as Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Georgia also have similar laws in place.

Orthodontist raises $100,000 for charities

Project Smile, a charitable giving program sponsored by Atlanta orthodontist Dr. Robert Pickron of Pickron Orthodontic Care, has just reached a major milestone. In less than two years, the program has raised $100,000 for local charities.

Project Smile turns the frustration and expense of a child’s lost or broken retainer into a rewarding experience. Instead of paying Pickron Orthodontic Care for the cost of retainer repair or replacement, the patient writes a check to support one of five local charitable organizations in the Project Smile program. Pickron Orthodontic Care matches all contributions dollar-for-dollar.

Achieving a milestone of his own as well, Dr. Pickron, who created Project Smile, is celebrating 40 years as a practicing orthodontist this year. His company, Pickron Orthodontic Care, is the largest privately owned orthodontic practice in the United States. It includes 24 offices throughout metro Atlanta.

Dr. Pickron became board certified in Georgia in 1975. He was honored recently having been twice voted as Gwinnett Magazine’s “Best Dental Practice” and Inside Gwinnett Magazine’s “Best Orthodontist.”

Brody School awarded $295K grant from charitable trust

East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine has been awarded a $295,781 grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust to establish a pediatric preventive dental clinic for overweight children without access to dental care.

The program will be the first of its kind in the country and will serve as a model for the integration of dental care in pediatric subspecialty care of children with complex diseases, said Dr. Sara G. Grossi, a periodontist, research professor and director of the grant.

Patients will come from the ECU Pediatric Health Research and Treatment Center, created in 2003 by the Department of Pediatrics in response to the epidemic of childhood obesity in eastern North Carolina. Regional studies have shown twice as many children in eastern North Carolina are considered overweight compared to children nationally.

“The program has the potential to improve the lives of hundreds of children in eastern North Carolina,” Grossi said. “Dental diseases, obesity and type 2 diabetes are all lifestyle-associated conditions and as such amenable to prevention and early intervention.”

The pediatric preventive dental clinic will collaborate with the recently approved ECU School of Dentistry and will be integral to the education and training of new general and pediatric dentists and will provide excellent opportunities for integrating oral health into the medical curriculum.

Oral or dental infection and inflammation play an important role in increasing the risk of type 2 diabetes in overweight children. Higher levels of gingivitis have been detected in children and adolescents with diabetes compared to children of the same age without diabetes.

Bacteria from dental plaque that causes swollen, bleeding gums and gum pockets doesn’t just affect the tooth root but other parts of the body as well and has a significant negative effect in diabetes and the ability to control blood sugar, Grossi said.

An examination of 50 children from the ECU Pediatric clinic revealed that 50 percent had untreated dental cavities, 95 percent had gingivitis, 60 percent had bleeding gums, 19 percent had tartar build-up and 10 percent had juvenile periodontitis.