AAO expands its Donated Orthodontic Services program to include more children

Pro bono care to be offered nationwide to qualified patients

The American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) has announced it is expanding its Donated Orthodontic Services (DOS) program nationwide to provide opportunities for low-income children across the country to receive pro bono orthodontic treatment. The program previously operated in nine states. “Every child should have the opportunity to have a healthy, beautiful smile that will have a positive impact throughout their lives,” said Morris N. Poole, DDS, past president of the AAO. “Thanks to the generosity of AAO member orthodontists who donate their time and talents to the program, more young patients will have the opportunity to achieve a functional bite, an attractive smile and good oral health.”

The DOS program is designed to provide orthodontic treatment to economically disadvantaged children who lack insurance coverage or who do not qualify for other dental health assistance where they live.

DOS is administered by the Dental Life Line Network (DLN), an organization that helps match patients who need care with doctors who can provide it. Applications are available at www.mylifemysmile.org/dos. Qualifying criteria include a low-income threshold and an examination by a general dentist to assess overall oral health.

Applicants must be patients of record of a general or pediatric dentist or a dental clinic. Poole notes that many accepted patients come into the program as a result of a referral from their family dentist.

“We are working hard to make the program as inclusive as possible,” Poole said. “A $200 program administration fee is required at the time of application. While it’s a relatively low fee, we appreciate that it may be a stretch for some families. To that end, provisions are in place to provide assistance, which is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.”

DOS typically advises that patients who have special needs seek orthodontic care through medical insurance or state-funded programs such as Medicaid.

As the DOS program builds its network of volunteer orthodontists nationwide, it expects to offer free treatment to 250 young patients in the coming year. Since 2009, nearly 500 patients have been treated in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Michigan and Virginia.

Mindful of children who do not live near a volunteer orthodontist, the DLN will attempt to identify a nearby orthodontist who is willing to offer them pro bono treatment.

In states with two or more pro bono programs, Poole recommends that families apply for only one program at a time, leaving the option open to apply for alternative programs in the future if an application is declined.

Dental industry partners supporting Donated Orthodontic Services include DENTSPLY GAC International and Align Technologies.

(Source: American Association of Orthodontists)