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Higgins Announces \$2.25 Million for Erie County Medical Center to Assist WNY Dental Patients with Special Needs

Expanded Services Made Possible Through Collaborative Effort With People Inc.

Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-26) announced the award of a 5-year federal grant totaling \$2.25 million through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) for expansion of their Special Needs Dentistry program.

The Special Needs Dentistry program at Erie County Medical Center plans to use this federal funding to create a state-of-the-art dental center dedicated to the unique needs of adult patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Collaborating with People Inc., ECMC plans to outfit the center with specialized dental equipment, as well as support faculty and staff dedicated to treating this underserved population. The funding will also be used to train dental providers so that they may pursue careers in the community with the necessary skills to treat adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Part of this award will be devoted to improving the training of dental residents, students and assistants both chairside and in the operating room.

"For residents of Western New York, ECMC and People Inc. are trusted providers of quality services and care and this initiative takes the incredible work they do one step further," **said Congressman Higgins.** "This federal grant supports an exciting partnership that will strengthen and grow opportunities to better serve and improve the health of people with special needs."

Elizabeth B. Kapral MS, DDS, Attending Dentist, Oral Oncology & Maxillofacial Prosthetics, Erie County Medical Center said, "Alongside my incredible colleagues at ECMC, I have worked diligently over the past 5 years to improve dental care for adults with special healthcare needs, and to train the next generation of dentists to feel confident in doing the same throughout their careers. When I began my tenure at ECMC, our department identified this great need in the community, and worked tirelessly to address that need. We were thrilled that People Inc. approached

us with this opportunity, but quickly realized the need for grant funding to make this dream possible. I am immensely grateful to my colleagues and administrators at ECMC who afforded us this opportunity to work with People Inc. and the population they serve. We could not be more thrilled."

Rhonda Frederick, President and CEO of People Inc said, "To tackle big issues, it's all about collaboration. People Inc. and our Elmwood Health Center are very happy to work with ECMC on establishing a Dental Clinic as part of overall plan for the new Health Center under construction now. Dr. Kapral's passion and expertise are incredible assets to this team effort. Best of all, the dental needs of our special population are going to be met in a quality manner in a convenient and familiar setting!"

This federal funding was awarded under the HHS's Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grants for General, Pediatric, and Public Health Dentistry, the purpose of which is to improve access to dentistry services, particularly to low income, underserved, uninsured, underrepresented minority, health disparity, and rural populations.