

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

UMMC Dentists, Colgate team up to screen students

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JACKSON, Miss. – Four-year-old Emmanuel Burns has a beautiful set of teeth, or so Dr. Shelley Ellis discovered after giving him an oral examination.

"I'm so proud of you!" she beamed at the quiet little boy. "Do you know how many teeth you've got?"

Emmanuel nodded and held up two fingers.

"You know what?" Ellis said, smiling, "you've got two times ten, that's how many teeth you have."

Emmanuel, a pre-K student at Smith Elementary School in Jackson, was one of approximately 400 students at the school to be screened on Tuesday, September 22, as part of an oral health care awareness event put on by the Colgate: Bright Smiles, Bright Futures program. The School of Dentistry's Pediatric Dentistry and Public Health faculty and the pediatric residents at Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children participated in the event.

Early Tuesday morning, the Colgate Mobile Dental van arrived in front of the school and staff members began the daunting task of rotating groups of curious elementary students on board in small groups. In addition to Ellis, a pediatric dentistry resident, students were screened by faculty members Dr. Neva Eklund and Dr. Lubna Fawad as well as Dr. Rose Reiss, also a resident.

"We are looking to see if they have decent hygiene – are they cleaning their teeth properly?" Eklund explained. "And they can also have clean teeth but rotten teeth, so we look for that as well and triage that decay."

Each student has a checklist, and parents are notified of anything that requires immediate attention.

"It's about community outreach, but it's also about raising awareness of Children's Hospital where we can do it all," Eklund said. She explained that they're not trying to compete with the students' regular dentists but simply promoting oral health and education.

"We are the only pediatric dentistry residency in the state and the only place that will put kids to sleep," she said. "There are very few pediatric anesthesiologists in the whole country."

She mentions the student who was sitting in her exam chair several minutes earlier. The pre-K student is a prime candidate to refer to the Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children, she said.

"He has decay in many places and he's only 4-years old," Eklund said.

Colgate's Bright Smiles, Bright Futures program promotes oral health care and prevention to underserved children around the world.

"There are eight vans around the country," said Nathaniel Green, who operates one of the Colgate dental vans with his wife, Holmesetta. "This van visits seven states around the South."

The paid a similar visit to Brown Elementary School on Wednesday.

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