Dental groups respond to PBS documentary

PBS recently aired “Dollars and Dentists,” a documentary produced by Frontline and the Center for Public Integrity and billed as an investigation into America’s dental care crisis. The program exposed gaps in access to care and underscored the plight of those who cannot afford treatment. After the broadcast, several dental organizations issued responses.

According to the program, finding a dentist can seem next to impossible for about a third of the U.S. population, especially those in rural areas and whose income put them at or below the poverty line. More than 49 million people face difficulty finding care, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. A separate analysis by the Pew Center for the States found that more than 17 million low-income children go each year without receiving any dental care.

“The dental system that we have works pretty well for most people, particularly those who have money and transportation and don’t need very much,” Shelly Gehshan, director of the Pew Children’s Dental Campaign, said. “But if you are anyone else — if you are in an institution, a nursing home, a prison, if you have special needs of any sort, if you are a young child, if you’re a low-income person, rural, if you’re in that one-third of the population, it’s not so much that the system is broken, I would say there isn’t one for them.”

In a written statement issued after the program aired, the American Dental Association (ADA) responded: “The needless suffering caused by untreated dental disease that could have been prevented or easily treated in its early stages is unacceptable. Coverage by PBS’s ‘Frontline’ and other media can increase awareness of this ongoing tragedy and, we hope, the

By Fred Michmershuizen, Dental Tribune America

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Crayfish found to have substance on teeth similar to human enamel

A team of Israeli and German scientists from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) and the Max Planck Institute of Colloids and Interfaces in Potsdam, Germany, have found an enamel-like layer in the mandibles of freshwater crayfish, according to an article in Nature Communications, “Enamel-like Apatite Crowns Covering Amorphous Mineral in a Crayfish Mandible.”

Dr. Shmuel Bentov from BGU’s Avram and Stella Goldstein-Goren department of biotechnology engineering discovered that this species of crayfish protect their teeth against wear in a very specific and surprising manner. They produce a highly mineralized protective coating based on calcium phosphate, which is strikingly similar to the enamel of vertebrates.

“Enamel is the best solution for coating moving parts and organs of animals,” Bentov explains. “We assume that in the course of evolution, both vertebrates and this crayfish independently developed enamel-like tissues to address similar needs. Crusta-

ceans discard their old teeth during the molting events several times throughout their life, and grow new exoskeletons and teeth regularly and rapidly” Dr. Amir Berman, also from the department of biotechnology engineering, and Prof. Amir Sagi, from BGU’s department of life sciences and National Institute for the study of LSB materials in Beer-Sheva, Sede Boqer and Eilat in the larger sense, a societal failure to value oral health. Taking on just one of them won’t work, we must continue to approach the problems holistically.”

A June 26 PBS Frontline documentary on dental care continues to generate discussion on access-to-affordable care issues among patients and providers. Photo/PBS.org

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political will to do something about it.”
Also from the ADA statement: “We must not let a few bad actors tarnish the work of thousands of honest, caring dentists who treat Medicaid patients, often for break-even or even negative revenues. They do so because they feel a responsibility to provide care to people whose economic circumstances would otherwise prevent them from receiving it. Further, many dentists who cannot afford to participate in Medicaid or wrestle with its often onerous paperwork instead treat needy pa-
tients for free. One estimate has U.S. dentists providing some $2.6 billion in free or discounted care in a single year.

There are right ways and wrong ways to improve access to dental care in America. The right way is to understand that while oral health care is essential, the ultimate goal is oral health. The right way is to rec-
ognize that there are multiple barriers that impede tens of millions of Ameri-
cans from attaining optimal oral health, including geography, culture, language, poverty and, in the larger sense, a societal failure to value oral health. Taking on just one of them won’t work, we must continue to approach the problems holistically.”

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