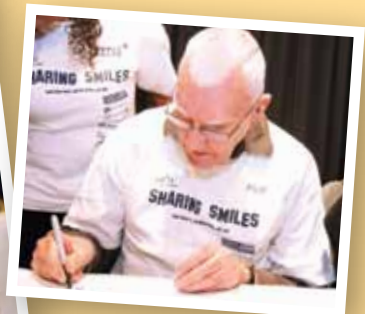




# Sharing Smiles Day

BY TODD DEVLIN (MA'09)







**S**chulich Dentistry launched another exciting outreach program last year, as the school hosted London's first-ever 'Sharing Smiles Day,' an event aimed at removing barriers, raising awareness, and educating students and dentists about the importance of oral health care for persons with special needs.

Close to 250 people – including 100 students and 100 special needs participants – attended the event last April, which was a partnership between Schulich Dentistry, Community Living London and 'Oral Health, Total Health.' The day included games led by the dental students, a luncheon and demonstrations by faculty dentists on proper oral care.

"It was pure, natural fun between the client and the student, and that's the connection we wanted," says Jeremy McCallum, a third-year Schulich Dentistry student who co-chairs the London chapter of Oral Health, Total Health.

"Initially, (the participants) were a little timid. But then when they walked into the room where we had games, it was hard not to smile."

Michelle Palmer, Executive Director of Community Living London, was also extremely pleased with the event.

"It was the perfect combination of fun and learning," she says. "Dental students learned about providing adapted dental care, and the people we support learned that the future dentists they met are lots of fun and not to be feared."

Dental care is one of the top unmet health needs for persons with special needs, and research has shown that this client population is at an increased risk of oral disease. Unfortunately, individuals with physical and/or intellectual disabilities have trouble finding care in their communities – in part due to dentists' lack of comfort with special needs patients, as well as misconceptions about treatment.

That's a situation that McCallum and his colleagues hope to change.

"The students got the chance to interact with the special needs participants and see them as people," McCallum says. "Now they will be more likely to make a commitment to treating (special needs patients) when they graduate, increasing access to dental care for this population."

Dr. Harinder Sandhu, Director of Schulich Dentistry, takes a great deal of pride in the outreach program. "This is the most amazing initiative undertaken by our dental students," he says. "Schulich Dentistry trains students to be socially responsible, and this is a wonderful example of that."

McCallum and his team are now looking ahead to the second annual 'Sharing Smiles Day.' This year's event will be held on March 27, 2011 from 10 am-2 pm at The Great Hall on Western's campus. ☺

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