

Spending up to \$2,000 for dentures was out of the question for Nelda Rothwell.

Having money to pay for them wouldn't have been a big problem if her husband were still alive. But living on a fixed income makes basic necessities such as dentures seem luxurious.

"My income is limited to Social Security and the little amount of retirement I receive," said the 77-year-old Lincoln widow.

Fixed incomes, disability and unemployment hardships force many adults and children to go without dental care.

Rothwell couldn't bring herself to ask her children to pay for her dentures.

Fortunately for her, a special program through the University of Nebraska Medical Center will pay for her dentures. The UNMC College of Dentistry is providing \$40,000 in free dental care for adults in need who live in Lincoln. The care is funded through a \$20,000 grant and the college is waiving another \$20,000 in services.

The grant, renewable up to three years, is part of a \$178,000 award from

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OUTREACH

by Vicky Cerino

Community Health Endowment of Lincoln to the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department for a variety of health services.

Part of the grant will go toward providing dental services to high-risk, low-income adults and minorities who cannot access emergency and routine dental services such as exams, fillings, cleaning, oral surgery, dentures and root canals. It also serves those who cannot access dental services due to transportation and language barriers.

The Community Health Endowment of Lincoln was created from proceeds of the 1998 sale of Lincoln General, a former municipal hospital. The endowment's goal is to enable Lincoln to be the healthiest community in the nation.

"If it wasn't for the program, I wouldn't have teeth," Rothwell said.

Although 43 million people in the United States have no health insurance, three times as many have no dental coverage, according to a first-ever report on America's oral health released in 2000 by the U.S. surgeon general. Many people get dental services on their own or go without.

The report emphasized the need to reduce economic barriers of good oral health care.



Vicky Cerino

Senior dental student J.P. Bartoletti performs an oral examination on Nelda Rothwell, a recipient of a grant to provide free dental care to underserved and minority adults in Lincoln.

Lori Vrtiska Seibel, executive director of the endowment, said that during the public hearings and grant review process, it became evident that dental services needed to be included as part of a holistic approach to health.

"We became more aware of the need for dental care among the underserved. It's so easy to overlook with all the other health issues. Dental problems can make people just as sick as other health issues," Seibel said.

"We are excited about this opportunity," she said.

"We think it will make a difference in the people we want to reach."

The College of Dentistry and state health department submitted one of 60 grant applications to serve the health needs of underserved, at-risk people in Lincoln. The endowment awarded \$1.2 million to 18 of the projects.

Dental and dental hygiene students will provide services for those screened and referred by the health department through its clinics.

"This is a much-needed community service," said Mike Molvar, D.D.S., associate professor in the UNMC College of Dentistry. "We've been working for years to obtain funding to provide this care."

He said the opportunity also helps students hone their dental and communications skills with patients who normally do not receive care, as well as learn the importance of service to the community.

Senior dental student J.P. Bartoletti feels good about helping the community.

"It's important to me to be able to serve people in need, no matter what income they have. I'm happy to be able to help and I plan to continue once I have a practice of my own." d

ADULTS LIVING IN LINCOLN WHO WOULD LIKE TO APPLY FOR THE PROGRAM CAN CALL THE LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT AT (402) 441-8015.