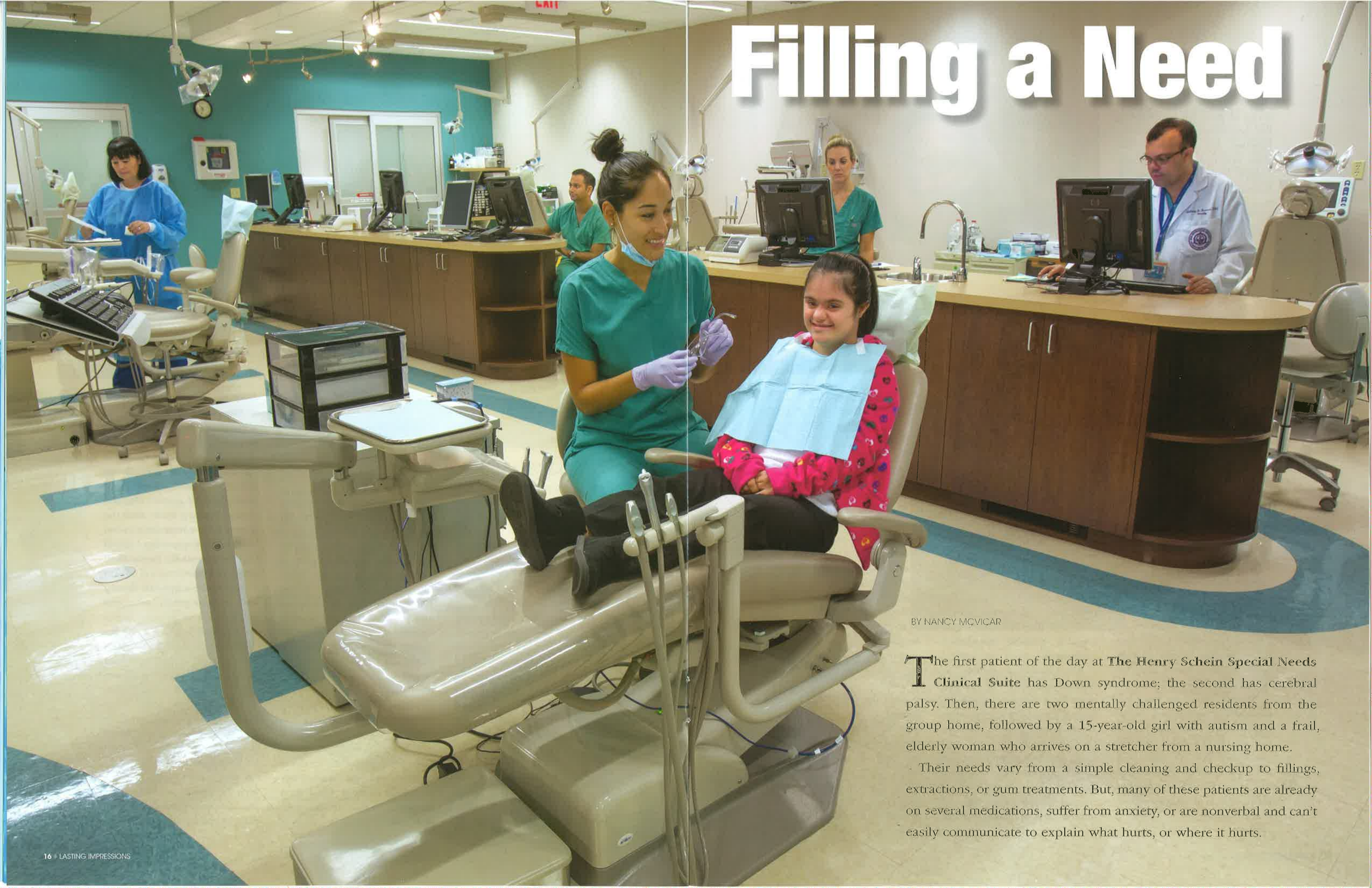


Filling a Need



BY NANCY MCVICAR

The first patient of the day at **The Henry Schein Special Needs Clinical Suite** has Down syndrome; the second has cerebral palsy. Then, there are two mentally challenged residents from the group home, followed by a 15-year-old girl with autism and a frail, elderly woman who arrives on a stretcher from a nursing home.

Their needs vary from a simple cleaning and checkup to fillings, extractions, or gum treatments. But, many of these patients are already on several medications, suffer from anxiety, or are nonverbal and can't easily communicate to explain what hurts, or where it hurts.

None of these patients are likely to be seen in the average dental practice, but it is an everyday occurrence for the faculty members and students at the clinic operated by Nova Southeastern University's College of Dental Medicine in North Miami Beach. NSU's dental school has a long history of treating patients who would otherwise have trouble getting needed care, said Diane Ede-Nichols, D.M.D., M.H.L., M.P.H., chair of Community Dentistry for NSU's College of Dental Medicine.

Through the years, dental students, graduate students, and faculty members have provided treatment in such settings as the Women In Distress shelter for battered women—repairing damage from broken teeth and battered jaws, the Ryan White HIV-AIDS Clinic in Oakland Park, Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood—treating children with cranial-facial problems, and the Baudhuin Preschool at the Mailman Segal Center—providing dental care for autistic children and other youngsters with special needs.

The NSU students and faculty members also have treated jail inmates and women in a drug rehabilitation facility. The students have done rotations in rural settings, which helps these future dentists decide if they would want to practice in underserved areas after graduation.

"People who are disabled, medically compromised, homebound, or institutionalized are at increased risk for dental diseases," Ede-Nichols said. "But these individuals encounter great difficulties finding dentists able to offer them care in a typical private practice setting."



Ede-Nichols, who received her dental degree from New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson College of Dental Medicine and completed a general practice residency at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, also has a master's degree in health law from NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center and a master's degree in public health from the NSU College of Osteopathic Medicine. She said the goal of the special needs program is to increase the number of dentists who have the knowledge and confidence to provide dental care to people with challenging physical, medical, and behavioral needs.

All graduating seniors in NSU's dental school have a one-day-a-week rotation through the Special Care Clinics over a five-week period, while others—including eight first-year residents and four second-year residents—provide dental care there full time. The residents focus on treating people with acquired and/or developmental disabili-

ties, as well as those who have special challenges such as physical movement or communication difficulties. Florida, along with the rest of the nation, is facing a severe shortage of dentists who have the experience and skills to serve this population.

"From the age of 15 up, we treat anyone with a developmental disability—Down's, autism, or some kind of syndrome with intellectual delay. We treat the frail elderly—someone with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's or stroke patients," Ede-Nichols said. "We treat people with disabilities acquired from near drowning, motor vehicle accidents, or dealing with severe drug problems as well."

Until the fall of 2012, these special needs patients were seen at NSU's main campus in the Davie-Fort Lauderdale area, but then the clinic moved to NSU's North Miami Beach facility at 1750 NE 167th Street. It now shares a building with the general dentistry, medical, and

PAGE 16 AND LEFT: NSU's Henry Schein Special Needs Clinical Suite treats patients from across the state.

optometry clinics. This relocation enables the special needs dentistry clinic to serve a broader patient population in both Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

NSU's special needs clinic is one of only a few in Florida, so it draws patients from across the state. Tuesdays and Thursdays are among the busiest days because residents of two group homes in Fort Myers are transported to the clinic for their dental care.

Because many of these patients are nonverbal or don't always understand what is being done for them, special techniques are used to calm them and sometimes rewards are offered—strategies necessary to help them cooperate in their care, Ede-Nichols said. "We use the 'tell, show, do' method," she said. "We tell them what we're going to do, show them, and then do it. 'I'm going to count your teeth,' use the tool to show them, touch them, then do it."

Some patients require oral sedation or are placed on a papoose board, wrapping them up so they feel safe, she said. With others, positive reinforcement—a reward system—works.

"We try to find out what they like—a particular food, a particular musical artist—and if they like Beyonce, for example, we can pull [a singing performance] up on a computer screen and it distracts them. We sometimes use diet soda, or toy giveaways, different kinds of little rewards," she said. "We'll put it where they can see it so they can focus on it."

Although it is a team effort often requiring from two to six people to treat each patient, only the lead dentist speaks to the patients—explaining, soothing, letting them know they will get a break soon, she said. "We use

FOUNDATION HELPS HEALTH HAPPEN

The Henry Schein Cares Foundation's mission "helps health happen." It achieves this by supporting not-for-profit organizations, institutions, and communities dedicated to health education and care for at-risk and underserved populations.

The foundation has been instrumental in assisting NSU's College of Dental Medicine in extending its community-based programs, supporting one of the university's core values.

In honor of the foundation's generosity, the College of Dental Medicine's Special Needs Clinic in North Miami Beach was renamed The Henry Schein Special Needs Clinical Suite. The clinic opened during the fall of 2012.

The foundation gave \$350,000 to the College of Dental Medicine's clinic, this includes \$100,000 in cash and an in-kind donation of \$250,000.

For more information about the foundation, visit www.hscarefoundation.org.

'one voice.' Usually the providing dentist takes command of that ship. They will say things like 'look into my eyes.' Even with people very minimally alert, you can command their attention," Ede-Nichols said. "We have a fabulous staff at the clinic that reinforces these concepts, and has the patience to work with these individuals."

Some patients have more complex problems that can't be treated at the clinic. When that is the case, they are taken to either Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood or to Broward Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale.

"Our goal is to create a pool of practitioners who can care for these patients," Ede-Nichols said.

One such practitioner is student Arwa Alwehaib, a married mother of two who was a practicing dentist in her native Iraq before she and her family came to the United States. She worked as a dental assistant for two years before she got into the NSU program.

Her husband, also a dentist in Iraq, now works as a dental assistant. He plans to pursue his dental degree once his wife is finished with school.

Alwehaib said that she knows she and the others at the special needs clinic are making a difference for patients who might otherwise not be getting care. "I know patients are in pain by seeing what's in their mouths, by taking X-rays, even if they can't say they are in pain,"

Alwehaib said.

Alwehaib said once she passes the dental board exam, she would like to continue working with special needs patients, possibly in an underserved area in Florida. "I love my career, and I am willing to go forward with this as a specialty," she said. "Every day, I feel blessed to be treating these patients." ♦