

A Mountain of Trouble From a Millimeter-Sized Mole Hill

by Heather DARROW



Since its inception in 1997, the Collin College dental hygiene program has maintained a 100 percent board pass rate...the college only accepts 16 dental hygiene students each year, though the department receives close to 100 applicants annually.

First year Collin College dental hygiene student, Veronica Silva.

As far as Amelia Campbell was concerned, it should have been a routine dental visit. She walked back to the operatory area, sat in the familiar reclining chair and opened her mouth for x-rays, but then she noticed something different. The Collin College dental hygiene student began to examine her skin.

"I never had an examination like that. She went around my ears and checked my neck. She was very thorough. It was shocking to me for the student to touch my face," Campbell said.

Campbell was surprised when the student handed her a referral and uttered the words, "I strongly encourage you to see a dermatologist." Still, she was not truly concerned.

"It was a small spot on my face. It was the size of the top third of my little pinky nail. I had it for a year or so. I never would have worried about it. To be quite honest, I wasn't going



2015 Collin College dental hygiene graduate Kelsey Simmons and dental hygiene patient Amelia Campbell.

to go to the dermatologist, but another Collin College dental hygiene student recommended that my husband make an appointment, so I made one too."

Campbell's dermatologist ordered a biopsy. When the dermatology office called her with the news that she needed to come in right away she began to worry in earnest.



"It was cancer. I had a melanoma, and it wasn't as little as I thought. When they operated they made an opening the size of a quarter, and it was a half-inch deep. We had a pool, and I love the sun, but I did not take precautions. I would never have known anything if the student hadn't told me to see the dermatologist. I was not that worried about it, but it turns out that I needed to be. I called the college clinic and told them what the student had done," Campbell said.

Treating the whole patient

McKinney resident and 2015 Collin College dental hygiene graduate Kelsey Simmons was a second year student in her clinical rotations when she examined Campbell.

"Students complete a visual skin inspection with all our patients. I can still see what that mole looked like in my head. I made a note for the dentist, she checked it out and we both wrote up the referral. I asked the patient to call with the results. It was great that she went to the dermatologist and got a biopsy. It was sad that it came back positive, but I am happy that she got it completely removed," Simmons said.

According to Christine McClellan, director of the college's dental hygiene program, students are taught to start assessing their patients from the moment they first greet them in the waiting room.

"We don't just clean teeth. We are experts in verifying health histories. We have to know the whole body to treat the mouth. We look at the whole patient," she said.

Service-based Education

Since its inception in 1997, the Collin College dental hygiene program has maintained a 100 percent board pass rate, according to McClellan. She adds that the college only accepts 16 dental hygiene students each year, though the department receives close to 100 applicants annually.

A staunch supporter of the program, McClellan received an associate of applied science degree from Collin College in 1997, a bachelor's of science degree with a major in dental hygiene from Texas Woman's University in 1999 and a master's of science in education from St. Joseph's College of Maine in 2014.

"Our program is very competitive and rigorous. Ninety percent of the faculty still work in private practice. They have real world experience, are published and passionate about education. Most of our professors are graduates of the Collin College dental hygiene program. We have the best jobs in the world. I was a mother of two when I took classes. It was a sacrifice for the whole family. My husband was my cheerleader. Our students amaze me because I know how hard it is. These students will take away skills from the faculty and a passion to give back to the community," McClellan said.

Service to the community is the backbone of this program. Adult patients receive a thorough dental exam, cleaning, oral cancer screening and x-rays for \$20. The fee is only \$10 for children 12 and under, and sealants are available for \$5 a



Collin College graduate and Director of the Collin College dental hygiene program Christine McClellan, Kelsey Simmons and Amelia Campbell.

quadrant. In addition, Collin College is the host school for the annual Give Kids a Smile Day which, according to McClellan, serves approximately 100 children annually.

The Beauty of Form, Function and Exceptional Education

Recently remodeled, the clinic now houses eight new operatories, digital patient records and x-rays in addition to a sterilization room with two workstations that are Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and infection-control compliant. The concept was to simulate a private practice environment.

The goal was immediately met according to Veronica Silva, first year Collin College dental hygiene student, who says two of the main reasons she decided to attend the college's program are the new facilities and equipment.

cabinets and chairside x-ray machines there are individuals who are

"Everything is clean and new and up to date. Collin College's facilities are more advanced than the other programs I was looking at. You get the same feel as working in a dental office. It is more realistic. The operatories are set up similar to the dental offices I shadowed in, and the sterilization room is pretty cool," she said.

While the facilities exceed functionality with a pleasing aesthetic, ultimately, behind the gleaming new instrumentation, touch

exceptionally trained to care for patients, patients like Campbell who know firsthand the priceless value of a thorough examination.

"I think Collin College gives a more detailed exam than a regular dental office. A lot of people think they are just students that are learning, but they have a doctor checking. It was all because of a student that I went to the dermatologist. I am thankful for her. We have told several people about our good experiences there. It could have cost me my life, but this young lady took her time," Campbell said.

To schedule an appointment with a Collin College dental hygiene student, call 972.548.6537. To learn more about the Collin College Dental Hygiene program, visit Collin.edu. ♦

Heather Darrow is a freelance writer for Collin College.

Photos: Nick Young, Collin College photographer