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Dental health focus of open forum

By **COLLIN SMITH**
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Among stories of four-year-olds with 32 rotted teeth, dental and other health providers met for an open forum Wednesday to discuss concerns and ideas on bettering dental care around the state.

Oral Health Awareness Colorado! hosted the event. It was the first time the organization had met outside of the Front Range, Executive Director Deborah Colburn said.

The meeting was supposed to give her group insight into what roadblocks the dental field faced — as well as what successes it had — in rural, western Colorado.

It went well, Colburn said.

“I think it went quite well,” she said. “For the first time out, for an organization that’s not that well known, we had a good turnout. It shows me people are really passionate about their work and people’s health.”

OHAC plans to reach out to the rest of the state in the future, she added. Its next forum is planned for Montrose on Nov. 1.

Craig was the first of between eight and twelve forums OHAC hopes will give it a better perspective on what to recommend to legislators and the Blue Ribbon Commission for Health Care Reform.

The Blue Ribbon Commission will make five proposals to the state legislature at the end of January 2008. Currently, most of the proposals feature some

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form of adult dental Medicaid coverage.

The Commission’s final recommendation will probably fea-

ture some form of adult dental coverage, and may expand Child Health Plan Plus insurance to meet the need out there, Colburn said.

The current Medicaid reimbursement schedule for dentists prevents many of them from seeing all the Medicaid patients that ask for services, said Dr. Glen Dean, DMD, of Grand Junction.

Dean may stop seeing Medicaid patients in the future, out of protest, because the reimbursements don’t afford him the possibility of having anything left after retirement, he said.

“Apparently, we have to create a crisis in Colorado for (the legislature) to wake up over there and do something about the problem,” Dean said.

Poor reimbursements also

make it hard for a dentist fresh out of school, who may have \$250,000 in student loan debt, to take on low income patients, he added.

Whatever the legislature ultimately does to reform Colorado health care, it will not affect some of the problems specific to Moffat County, such as the small number of available dentists and the trouble local offices have recruiting new ones.

One possibility is to write a grant to put a equipment and a dental patient chair at the hospital, Dean said. He had a friend receive about \$185,000 for such in La Junta.

If the Yampa Valley could attract some dentists, young or old, to come to the area for a short time, the lifestyle here may be enough to persuade them to stay permanently, Dean added.

“There’s nothing wrong with Craig,” Dean said. “If you could get them in here, if there’s a new hospital being built, if it’s possible to get a grant writer and one or two chairs (at the hospital), you have a lot to offer here.”

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