

# Providing Necessary Dental Care for Military Veterans

In March 2003, Oklahoman Joe C. deployed to Iraq with the U.S. Army Reserve in perfect health and with a beaming smile, says his mother Cynde. Joe completed his active duty and after returning home in April 2004, he developed post-traumatic stress disorder as well as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) that caused his teeth to rapidly decay.

With minimal dental insurance, Joe was in desperate need of help. His mother contacted the Dentists for the Disabled and Elderly in Need of Treatment (D-DENT), a nonprofit organization that provides dental care to low-income, uninsured elderly and developmentally disabled Oklahomans through a network of volunteer dentists. Thanks to an Access to Health Care iFund grant, Joe and other Oklahoma veterans are now receiving much needed dental care.

“As a veteran, I feel blessed and fortunate to get the kind of professional and personal care that I received from D-DENT,” says Joe. “D-DENT not only helped me regain my physical smile, but a genuine smile in my heart knowing that there are people who really care.”

Through its veterans’ project, D-DENT matches patients with area dentists and dental hygienists who volunteer services in their own offices. Comprehensive dental services including cleanings, fillings, root canals, extractions and dentures are provided at no cost to clients and D-DENT covers all lab costs. Additionally, the veterans receive preventive education and oral health kits to maintain their dental health.



Eligibility for dental benefits is very limited for veterans and typically only cover one-time services, says Shirley Harris, D-DENT executive director. Before the project was launched, military veterans were placed on a waiting list with an average wait of three years. With the support of the iFund grant, D-DENT will provide dental services for up to 125 military veterans in the project’s first year.

“Military members sacrifice so much, yet ask for so little in return,” says Harris. “With the commitment of many D-DENT volunteers and the funding from the Access to Health Care iFund grant, our veterans are able to improve their oral health and regain their smiles.”



*Above: D-DENT volunteers Dr. J. Don Harris and staff reveal Joe's new smile to D-DENT executive director Shirley Harris.*

*Right: Joe C.*



Thanks to an Access to Health Care iFund grant, up to 125 under and uninsured veterans in Oklahoma will receive comprehensive dental care as well as preventive oral health education through the Dentists for the Disabled and Elderly in Need of Treatment (D-DENT) veterans' project.



*Oklahoma City dentist Dr. J. Don Harris volunteers his services through D-DENT to help military veterans such as Joe C.*

You can help make a difference in our community through iFunds with a minimum gift of \$25. We'll combine your gift with others to award grants to support deserving projects like D-DENT's dental care for veterans program. To make a gift to an iFund, visit [www.ifundokc.org](http://www.ifundokc.org) or contact us at 405/235-5603.



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