

Free dental clinic for the needy displaced by CCRI

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A decision by the Community College of Rhode Island not to host the 2017 Rhode Island Mission of Mercy free dental clinic has elicited a strong protest from leading health-care professionals who volunteer their services to needy individuals. Originally planned for late May, the two-day clinic will not be held this year.

WARWICK, R.I. — A decision by the Community College of Rhode Island not to host the 2017 Rhode Island Mission of Mercy free dental clinic has elicited a strong protest from leading health-care professionals who volunteer their services to needy individuals.

Originally planned for late May, the two-day annual clinic could not be rescheduled after the school notified organizers of the decision in early May, and it will not be held this year.

“The Mission of Mercy was running with no issues in its five-year tenure, providing free dental services to 800-plus individuals who were uninsured, underinsured or who could not access dental care,” Mission of Mercy Steering Committee Member Marcia Braganca said. “It is a shame that a facility built with taxpayer money would be shut off to Rhode Island residents who need it the most.”

According to the organization, Mission of Mercy volunteers from 2012 to 2016 “performed 15,843-plus oral procedures, exams and screenings, on more than 4,000 patients, worth a total combined value of \$2.3 million.”

In a letter sent in early May to Woonsocket dentist Jeffrey E. Dodge, president of the Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation, which convenes the annual Mission of Mercy Clinic, CCRI Vice President for Academic Affairs Rosemary A. Costigan wrote that the college this year could not devote the space on its Lincoln campus where the free clinic was held.

That space, CCRI’s own Dental Hygiene Clinic, “is an academic space for our students” that is no longer appropriate for outside use, she wrote.

Costigan said, however, that the college would make available a field house either in Lincoln or its main campus in Warwick for a free clinic next year, and would “absorb the staffing costs,” estimated at about \$10,000, “related to the set-up, security and weekend-long use of the

space.”

She said: “CCRI remains supportive of this event that serves so many people with critical dental care, and we would like to continue our partnership.”

But Libby Swan, executive director of the Rhode Island Oral Health Foundation and Rhode Island Mission of Mercy program director, said the actual costs of staging the clinic in a field house, not an already-equipped facility, would be much greater than \$10,000.

“We cannot utilize the field house due to the additional cost and logistics,” she told The Journal. “We have to look into other venues and there isn’t another venue that will allow us to provide the services we have provided at CCRI.”

The fate of the clinic next year, as of now, she said, “is unknown.”

She added: “At the end of the day, we just want to continue to provide these services to those who need it the most.”