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National Oral Health Literacy Campaign Unveiled At Baltimore Elementary/Middle School

***Symbolic new handbook identifies many resources to support teachers
in improving the oral health of students***

Baltimore, Maryland (April 11, 2011). The Maryland Children's Oral Health Institute (MCOHI) unveiled *Code Red: The Oral Health Crisis In Your Classroom*® Empowering the Teacher to Teach Oral Health Education-A Curriculum Resource Reference at Dickey Hill Elementary/Middle School after 29 months of due diligence. The symbolic handbook, designed in the likeness of an apple, was officially introduced to teachers and other guests attending the launch as the first step in meeting the nonprofit organization's goal of equipping all educators with this literacy resource compiled to help them teach oral health education.

The MCOHI believes this initiative has educational potential that could lead to improving access to oral health care challenges especially faced by families living in poverty. Initiatives aimed at collaborations between oral health care professionals and our nation's educators could ultimately help to reduce the incidence of tooth decay particularly among the country's most vulnerable citizens. Children attending Title One schools may stand to benefit the most. The MCOHI feels that if children are taught these lessons each year, starting in kindergarten, they are more likely to develop into adults that better understand and appreciate the essential importance of maintaining good oral health.

The curriculum resource reference identifies meaningful materials to support teachers and to help them easily incorporate this recommended instruction into routine lessons plans. These lessons for elementary to high school students can integrate oral health into curricula areas such as mathematics, history and biology. In addition, the booklet includes signs and symptoms for recognizing oral health neglect in students. On page six, the "Cycle of Pain" outlines possible life-changing consequences of unaddressed dental disease.

Teachers, student teachers, student dentists and other guests each received a folder with samples of oral health lessons. Bulletin board resources, a striking poster of an oral piercing available from the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, a brochure about diabetes and dental health, compliments of Colgate Palmolive and a reflective "See Yourself Becoming A Dentist" notebook decal were just some of the other contents. The Dental Trade Alliance provided lapel pins that read "Oral Health Can't Wait." Everyone in attendance also received an inaugural edition of *Code Red: The Oral Health Crisis In Your Classroom*® Empowering the Teacher to Teach Oral Health Education- A Curriculum Resource Reference.

Attendees representing the office of Maryland 7th District Congressman Elijah Cummings, American Dental Association (ADA), National Dental Association (NDA), Any Dental Detail, Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools, Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore College of Dental Surgery

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Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program, Maryland Health Choice, Morgan State University, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Maryland Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Oral Health and Valley Dental Pediatrics took part in the unveiling event.

Congressman Elijah Cummings' Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director, Ms. Trudy Perkins, offered remarks in support of the initiative on his behalf. In his prepared statement the Congressman wrote, "By implementing initiatives like *Code Red* and partnering with our fellow dentists, dental students, teachers, physicians, school nurses, corporate supporters, legislative leaders and government officials, we can greatly improve children's oral health literacy in the state of Maryland. He noted children suffering from dental-related illness miss 51 million hours of school each year. Cummings pointed out the significant progress that has been made toward raising awareness of the importance of oral health care through programs like The Maryland Children's Oral Health Institute's *Lessons In A Lunch Box* initiative, the *Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009* and the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010*. His remarks included the always-bitter reminder that the death of 12 year-old Deamonte Driver in 2008 from an infected tooth was preventable."

Remarks by Dr. Willie Richardson, President of the Maryland Dental Society, and Dickey Hill principal, Mr. Aaron Clark underscored the value of this didactic focus. Both commended the literacy movement.

The American Dental Association and the National Association of School Nurses announced in February, that they were planning to launch a nationwide, school-based oral health awareness campaign this summer. The most current National Adult Literacy Survey showed that over 90 million people in the United States read at or below the eighth grade level. In terms of health information literacy, the implication is that a majority of adults in the United States may lack the needed literacy skills to effectively use the U.S. healthcare system, especially given that routine health tasks, such as understanding prescription instructions, understanding consent forms or following doctor's directions, often require more complex literacy skills than those needed to complete daily routine tasks. This data further substantiates the need for the oral health community to begin vigilantly partnering with educators. These concerted efforts will help facilitate ensuring preventive dental education is incorporated in school curriculums starting in kindergarten and through twelfth grade.

Following the welcome, a power point presentation illustrated and explained some of the disease factors that can lead to the unfolding of the oral health crisis in the classroom. An overview of the information contained in the booklet was highlighted, including a look at the across-the-board consequences oral health illness can inflict during the school day.

Prior to ending the program, examples of providing an oral health lesson were presented for teachers. Children participated in an oral health music lesson, singing the Brushing Song found on page 8i of *Code Red*. A five-minute brushing video was shown, the highlights reviewed and the engaged students awarded a toothbrush, toothpaste and dental floss.

The introduction of *Code Red: The Oral Health Crisis In Your Classroom* was made possible due in part to the sponsors who provided product donations, financial and or in kind support, including Brushtime Products, Inc., Colgate-Palmolive Company, Crest Oral-B, DentaQuest Foundation, Maryland Academy of General Dentistry, Maryland Dental Society, Maryland State Dental Association, 1-800-DENTIST, OrthoSynetics, Inc. and Valley Dental Pediatrics.

This fall, The Maryland Children's Oral Health Institute has plans to make several thousand hard copies of the nifty handbook available at no charge for as long as supplies last. It is currently available to be downloaded from the website. A flipbook version can also be viewed electronically.

For more information about Code Red: The Oral Health Crisis In Your Classroom[®] Empowering the Teacher to Teach Oral Health Education- A Curriculum Resource Reference and other program and initiatives developed by The Maryland Children's Oral Health Institute please visit www.mycohi.org.

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