

Testimony of Dr. Steve Ruiz
Division of General Dentistry
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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Re: UConn Health Budget 2021

My name is Steve Ruiz. I am a general dentist and a clinical assistant professor at UConn. I attended high school in Farmington, CT and I currently live in Rocky Hill, CT with my wife who is also a general dentist at UConn. Thank you very much for your support in the past and for taking the time to hear my testimony today.

Since before I was born my family has considered UConn a second home, my father came to UConn for his general dentistry residency and my brother also came to UConn for residency and served as faculty for 7+ years. So, when the time came, I knew I wanted to apply to UConn, I wanted to follow the philosophy that gave my father and brother success in life.

I was able to match at UConn for residency and had the privilege to practice at the general dentistry and Oral surgery clinic at UConn Health. The dedication these faculty have for education and their patients is overwhelming, not only helping train extremely competent dentists but also forming compassionate human beings prompted me to seek a career at UConn Health.

In 2017 I was lucky enough to be involved in a partnership between UConn Health and the Department of Developmental Services that had one goal in mind: Provide high-quality dental care to individuals with developmental disabilities. Through the partnership, the patient base grew at an incredible pace of 20-30 new patients monthly. Today, we have absorbed most of the dental patients from neighboring special care hospitals and clinics that closed, increased our reach to the North region, started another partnership in Southbury, CT to serve the western region, started a special care dentistry rotation with UConn Health dental residents/students and hired more staff to meet the demand.

UConn general dentistry residents have a one-of-a-kind unparalleled experience and education. They're able to get the training for special care dentistry from A to Z since the partnership doesn't end at the clinics, thanks to UConn we can provide dental care in the operating room to the most affected by developmental disabilities (nonverbal, aggressive and those unable to cooperate due to involuntary behaviors) that cannot be seen in a regular office setting.

The collaborative efforts to deliver high-quality dental care to individuals with intellectual disabilities were paramount during the months of March through September 2020 when the Department of Developmental Services clinics were closed due to COVID-19 and the only place that would accommodate these patients for any emergency was UConn Health. A mechanism was set up to potentially accommodate over 1200 patients of record in the south region alone. Without UConn to facilitate the demand for dental care access these individuals would not have gotten the care they need and deserve.

The power of a smile and impact on our Connecticut economy: I can recall one of many cases that illustrates the deep effects on our community. A patient came in to see us feeling very anxious and insecure about her life and future, in her mind she would never be able to get a stable job. She had always been mistreated and made fun of because of her disability and missing teeth. When she came into our clinic, she needed a new smile. We managed to return her smile and she had a major life breakthrough, not only did she regain her confidence, manage her autism and overcome her social anxieties, she was able to land a job as an associate at a major retailer. This success story derives directly from the partnership between UConn Health and the Department of Developmental Services. Helping individuals with developmental disabilities incorporate into our community and allow them to be self-sustainable, independent, and fulfilled.

Thanks to this partnership Connecticut is a nationwide leader in access to dental care for individuals with developmental disabilities. With your continued support, we can continue to lead.