

## PRESS RELEASE



# Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
1 Lower Navy Hill Road, Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950



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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### The Opportunity for Teledentistry at the Tinian and Rota Health Centers

Thanks to the diligent work and leadership of Dr. Angelica Sabino, the Dental Program of the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) has significantly increased dental care access on Rota and Tinian by traveling once a month to each island. Still, full-time preventive and restorative dental care is necessary for Tinian and Rota residents to meet all of their oral health needs. A full-time dental clinic remains a plane ride away for more than 5,000 CNMI residents, creating a significant barrier to care. Irregular dental care often results in pain and oral disease requiring even more intensive dental treatment. Oral health is not a luxury; it is an essential component of overall health, especially for pregnant women, people with diabetes, and people who use betelnut. Preventable oral diseases continue to cause pain and disability for many Tinian and Rota residents.

Of respondents to the 2016 CNMI Non-communicable Disease and Risk Factor Survey, only 30% of Tinian adults reported accessing dental care in the last 12 months, and nearly 13% of adults on Tinian reported missing 6 or more permanent teeth. Statistics from a sealant program which provides exams and sealants for all second and sixth grade students enrolled in the public school system on Rota during the 2018-2019 school year show that 96.15% of second grade students have at least one decayed tooth and 75% of sixth grade students have at least one decayed tooth. Regular access to on-island dental services would improve health outcomes and quality of life for children and adults alike.

To address the need for full-time dental care, the CHCC has made plans to expand full-time dental services to the islands at the local health centers using teledentistry. Under the CHCC's teledentistry model, resident dental professionals would work under the remote supervision of dentists on Saipan to provide clinical examinations, radiographs, sealants, silver diamine fluoride, fluoride varnish, prophylaxis, fillings, extractions and oral cancer screenings on a full-time basis. Regulatory amendments which allow dentists to remotely oversee the work of dental therapists and hygienists were passed by the CNMI's Health Care Professionals Licensing Board (HCPLB) last month. More complex dental procedures such as surgeries would still need to be referred to Saipan.

The health care sector is especially important to the economies of rural areas like Rota and Tinian. The CHCC's health care system provides services which are essential for maintaining a healthy population and a healthy workforce. Health care services, like teledentistry, also provide jobs and have the potential to provide more jobs for the Rota and Tinian communities. Business investments are more appealing when basic health services are available locally to support employees, and when residents can stay in their community to receive care, they are more likely to remain in that community to develop their livelihoods and families.

Although plans are in place, the CHCC needs to secure the funds needed for the initial equipment and software investments. Last August, the CHCC reached out to the local Tinian and Rota delegations for funding assistance of the roughly \$180,000 capital investment needed to establish the long-awaited

services on both islands. Revenues from operations are projected to sustain the dental service in the long-term. CHCC is the largest safety net health care provider in the CNMI, providing a wide scope of services to all patients equally, regardless of ability to pay.

For additional information on dental services or to make a dental appointment, please contact the CHCC Dental Clinic at (670) 236-8369 (Saipan), (670) 433-9233 (Tinian Health Center), or (670) 532-9461 (Rota Health Center).

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at [www.chcc.gov.mp](http://www.chcc.gov.mp) or call us at (670) 234-8950.

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