

# Putting Teeth *in* Public Health

Alum spearheads  
Arkansas' water  
fluoridation efforts;  
founds PANDA  
program to train  
dentists worldwide  
to recognize and  
report abuse

**D**r. Lynn Mouden has been called a communist, fascist and even the minion of the devil.

That's on a good day.

As the director of the Arkansas Health Department's Office of Oral Health, this UNC School of Public Health graduate has seen his share of concerned citizens questioning the statewide effort to fluoridate the water.

"You're not going to convince some of them. They work on emotion, not science," says Mouden, who earned his doctor of dental surgery at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1975 and his master's in health policy and administration from Carolina in 1994.

Instead, Mouden and his four-person staff have concentrated on crisscrossing the state, meeting with local officials, one community at a time. In fact, he says he's been to more city council meetings than he can remember. But the work is paying off. Local water system participation was at 49 percent when he arrived. It's now at 64 percent and getting closer all the time to the 75 percent goal.

Mouden's accomplishments look all the more impressive considering he started in Arkansas in 1999 with no budget or staff. Using his savvy political and leadership skills, he aligned himself with supportive legislators who developed and passed a statute requiring the state oral health program. He also built a

coalition of 38 organizations and nonprofit groups to advocate for oral health.

"All of that has been significant because we've been able to continue despite several major budget crises and two departmental reorganizations," he says.

Mouden, however, is perhaps best known for a national and international program called PANDA—Prevent Abuse and Neglect through Dental Awareness. PANDA trains dentists and other health professionals to recognize victims of family violence and provide appropriate intervention.

"Seventy-five percent of all physical abuse signs occur in the head, neck and mouth areas," says Mouden. "And yet, less than one percent of dentists were responsible for reporting such abuse."

Mouden's interest in family violence was

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strengthened at UNC while taking courses in the School of Public Health's executive master's program. However, it was seeing and reporting actual cases of abuse while he was a practicing dentist in the small Missouri town of Weston that really got his attention.



Dr. Lynn Mouden is the founder of the international program, PANDA — Prevent Abuse and Neglect through Dental Awareness. The program trains dentists and other health professionals to recognize victims of family violence and provide appropriate intervention. Mouden is director of the Arkansas Health Department's Office of Oral Health and holds a master's in health policy and administration from UNC.

“At one point, I talked to dentists from other towns in the state and asked if they were seeing what I was seeing, and they said they weren’t,” he says. “That got me thinking. Why am I seeing it in Weston and it wasn’t being seen anywhere else?”

He discovered that abuse wasn’t really more prevalent in Weston but that dentists in other towns were missing the signs in their young patients. So, joining forces with a dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental of Missouri, Mouden developed the educational material for PANDA and started spreading the word.

“I just took it upon myself to make it a personal mission.”

Now with 45 state and 12 international programs, PANDA has proven to be the driving force behind dentists and others do-

ing a better job of recognizing and reporting abuse and neglect.

“We are truly blessed to have Lynn Mouden’s experience and capabilities as our leader in improving oral health for all Arkansans,” says Ed Choate, president and chief executive officer of Delta Dental of Arkansas. “Through his efforts, we have greater awareness, understanding and oral health treatment for those most in need in our state.”

There’s no slowing this high achiever. Mouden has continued to expand the PANDA program, both in the United States and abroad, and to promote a “train the trainers” component to the program that he developed largely during his annual leave time. Mouden says it’s worth it, knowing he’s helped save lives. ■

— BY GENE PINDER