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KIRK HIROTA/Yakima Herald-Republic

Dental assistant Maribel Alvarado, left, helps Junn-Ming Huang, one of the two full-time dentists at Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, with a patient Friday afternoon.

# Helping Fill a Need in the Community

Yakima Neighborhood Health Services has people waiting in line for dental care

By **JULIE PETERSON**  
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

When a lack of access to health and dental insurance has reached what some would call crisis proportions, many community health clinics have expanded to meet the need.

The Yakima Neighborhood Health Services dental program, for example, now has dozens of people waiting early in the morning to get one of the 50 available appointments every month, underscoring the need for dental services, said Rhonda Hauff, primary care administrator for YNHS.

"We could double or triple the number of appointments and not meet the need," she said.

Just one year after expanding their dental program to include two full-time teams of dentists and hygienists, the clinic sees its 50 available appointments each month often filled by mid-

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**RHONDA HAUFF**  
Administrator, YNHS

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morning of the day they are offered. People often bring lawn chairs and wait in line as early as 5:30 a.m. on the first business day of the month, Hauff said.

As public health districts reduced their direct patient-care services due to budget cutbacks and more people try to cope without health insurance, many facilities like YNHS grew and changed to meet the need for preventive and pri-

mary care.

Nearly 25 years ago, YNHS started as a private nonprofit health clinic, providing education and preventive health services to low-income people.

It began with a weight-loss clinic, well-child exams, stop-smoking classes and physical exams in two houses at 12 S. Eighth St., and has expanded to include counseling, prenatal, dental and general medical care. Today, it also offers breastfeeding support, family planning, and the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program, a federal initiative to improve nutrition among mothers and children who are at risk.

The clinic has expanded services to include people from all income levels, added a new 11,000-square-foot clinic next to the original houses, and has bought other property as well. The den-

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# NEED/‘We Have Terrible Decay Rates’

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tal program, which began in 1996 and expanded last year, and their offices and exam rooms have taken over the space where the original clinic was once housed.

The program also includes working with other area dentists to participate in the highly successful “Mom and Me” program.

“Mom and Me” was created earlier this year by the Yakima Dental Society, the University of Washington and Washington Dental Service to provide a dental program for mothers and their children under 5 years old for preventive dental care. Along with 35 private dentists, YNHS joined in giving care to children and their mothers.

“In Yakima, we have terrible decay rates because children

don’t get in to a dentist until they’re 3 or 4 years old.” Hauff said. Many of the “Mom and Me” participants also have older children that need dental care, so when their younger siblings come in, they are often referred to YNHS.

One of the most exciting changes in dental care is the addition of fluoridation to the Yakima water supply, approved by voters in November, Hauff said.

“Those kids are the ones who will be helped the most,” Hauff said.

Of the 5.6 million people in the state of Washington, less than half have any kind of dental insurance. About 1.6 million have private insurance, and 900,000 more qualify for dental care under Medicaid, said Sean Pickard, a

spokesman for Washington Dental Service.

Up to 40 percent of the Medicaid-eligible people are children, and often they do not participate in programs for lack of access or knowledge, Pickard said.

YNHS’ funding is largely from patient fees (including Medicaid), which are charged on a sliding scale, and about a third of their money comes from grants and community donations.

More than half of the 13,000 patients at YNHS are on Medicaid, but many patients are coming in without any insurance, and those are increasing, Hauff said. Still others are coming in with insurance of their own.

Staff is also available to help YNHS patients apply for state health insurance and Medicaid.



Associated Press  
Luther  
At center

# POKEMON/More Is on the Way

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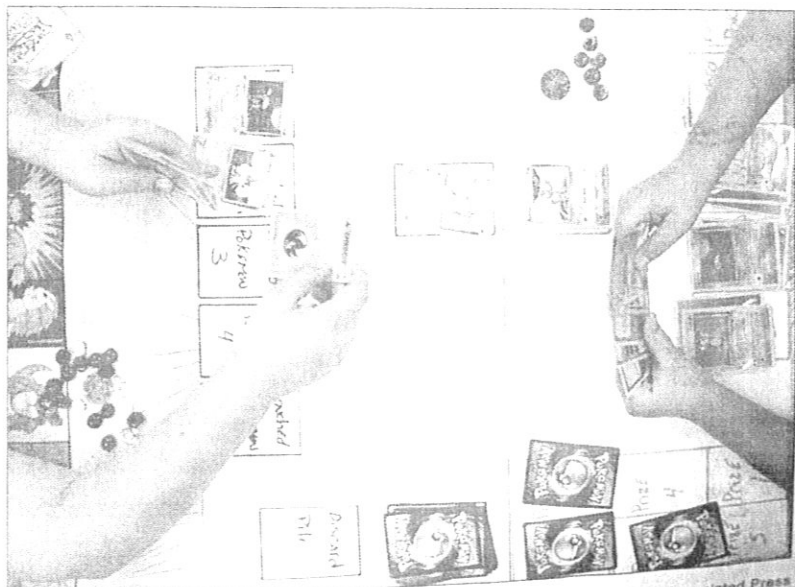
own powers, which can be enhanced or changed to battle its opponents.

That means kids have to strategize. And therein lies a large part of the game’s appeal: It makes kids think.

Pokemon is expected to account for 20 percent of all Christmas toy sales in the United States this year. Its star, the cuddly Pikachu, has graced the covers of both Time and the New Yorker.

Sales of Pokemon stuff in Japan alone added up to \$5.85 billion last year — but its true significance may transcend mere sales figures.

Japan’s economy — just now getting out from under its worst slowdown since World War II, — has lost the shine it once had. So Pokemon’s invasion of America



Associated Press  
Derek Ottaviano, 11, of Fairlawn, N.J., left, plays with Nicholas Cliffe, 10, of Teaneck, N.J. during a Pokemon match at the Toys R Us store in Paramus, N.J., in November.