

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Passing the Torch of Oral Health Education

NorthShore Dentist Leaves Lasting Impression on Future Generations of Caregivers

By Susan J. White

Truly a teaching healthcare system, NorthShore places a high priority on furthering medical education—transferring knowledge to the next generation—and honoring doctors whose leadership and guidance help others practice better medicine.

Harry Staffileno, Jr., DDS, who died January 1, 2011, was one of those exceptional mentors. His training and dedication to education left a lasting legacy that continues to improve dental care for families and communities across the North Shore.

“Dr. Staffileno’s knowledge was phenomenal, and he was ahead of his time,” said Leslie M. Reeder, DDS, who completed her own residency training under Dr. Staffileno nearly 20 years ago and continues the dental program for cancer patients he established in 1988.

“His passion rubbed off on me, and I am grateful to carry on what he started,” said Dr. Reeder, who shares her expertise with NorthShore Kellogg Cancer Center patients and others seeking care from the Dental Center at NorthShore Evanston Hospital.

Jack Cohn, diagnosed in 2010 with Stage IV head and neck cancer, is one of the patients benefiting from this legacy. Cohn’s oncologists were optimistic but made it clear he faced a long road of treatment ahead. His first step before an extensive course of chemotherapy and radiation was an appointment at the Dental Center.



Cancer patient Jack Cohn benefits from the legacy of compassionate care practiced by Dr. Leslie Reeder at the NorthShore Dental Center.

Dr. Reeder initially delivered dismal news; Cohn would need five teeth removed and must adopt a strict new regimen of oral hygiene. But she also left him with a feeling of compassion, which Cohn said was no small thing in the face of his new reality.

Dr. Reeder not only made an appointment for Cohn with an oral surgeon the next morning, but continued to monitor his progress throughout his treatment. “This is the definition of caring,” Cohn said.

Since radiation for head and neck cancer can damage the jaw bone, the standard of care typically means removing loose or diseased teeth before radiation begins, explained Dr. Reeder. Educating patients on the long-term side effects of radiation is equally important.

“I tell patients exactly what to expect so when they experience a new side effect they

will know it is normal and not a signal their cancer is back,” Dr. Reeder said.

Dr. Reeder works collaboratively with oncologists, often visiting patients during treatments so they don’t need to schedule another appointment. “Dr. Reeder hunted me down at least once a week to see how I was doing,” Cohn said. “She’s an angel.”

The NorthShore Dental Center serves the broader community—providing primary care services for medically underserved adult patients. The Center’s commitment to education also thrives as two University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine residents are based at the Center. Their presence is a testimony to Dr. Staffileno’s devotion to education. In addition to his longtime role as director of the Dental Residency program, he established an oncology lecture series in memory of his wife, Constance. **C**