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GUIDELINES FOR FREE DENTAL TREATMENT FOR CHILDREN FROM FRAGILE FAMILIES IN CHARGE OF NATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE DISTRICTS

Dxa - Un Dentista per Amico (A Dentist for a Friend) is a program that offers free conservative dental care to socio-economically disadvantaged children who have been placed temporarily in supportive housing communities, socio-educational centers, or protective housing. Our volunteer dentists provide this dental care to our patients for free.

Another program, **ASSO - A Scuola di Salute Orale e sana alimentazione (A Lesson on Oral and Nutritional Health)** is a dental prevention campaign especially dedicated to youngster teaching oral hygiene and nutrition skills, needed to maintain good oral and general health.

Associazione Arkè, which is a non-profit, volunteer organization (OdV), initiated these projects in 2000. It is the only organization providing these services on a national level.

The below regulations are inspired to the agreement signed between Arkè and the Main District of Liguria in 2013 and they will serve as a reference for agreements with other Italian regions.

HOW THESE PROGRAMS GET STARTED:

Using information provided by Arkè, the social health district takes responsibility to inform families with minor children about these programs, whether the families are under the care of a social health district or not.

After confirming an applicant's actual level of poverty and trustworthiness, an assigned welfare officer will email or fax to Arkè an **Indemnification Form (Manleva)** filled out and signed by a parent or guardian. This form is attached here and can also be downloaded from the Arkè web site. The Indemnification Form must contain:

- a list of all the minor children in the nuclear family (with their dates of birth and notes about any specific problems or pathologies any of them may have), listing all the children, even if the social worker cannot determine whether any of the children have a specific need for preventive dental care.
- all data relating to the nuclear family (names of parents or guardians, address, and phone number) and the name of any dentists who treated family members in the past,

the usual means of transportation (by public transit or by car), notes on whether the parents or guardians have serious illnesses that may prevent them from accompanying a child to the dentist's office, and any other useful information.

- **the social officer's contact information (name, address, phone number, email address),** so that Arkè can get in touch with him or her easily.

Arkè reserves the right to assess the level of need of any applicant referred by other non-profit organizations, such as Caritas or Red Cross.

AFTER RECEIVING A REQUEST FOR DENTAL CARE, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARKÈ TO:

- process the request
- search for an available dentist
- send an e-mail to the dentist with all the child's information
- send an e-mail to the social worker with the dentist's information
- contact the family to get to know them and make sure they understand how to use the service properly
- monitor the course of treatment

Applications are generally processed within two weeks. Therefore, if the person who identified the child does not receive the assignment of a dentist within two weeks, they should contact Arkè to check the status of the application.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SOCIAL OFFICER TO:

- **At the first meeting, have the applicant fill out the Indemnification Form (Manleva),** give the applicant a copy of the rules, read the rules together with the applicant and explain the rules in a way that assures the applicant understands the rules.
- **After receiving the e-mail with the assignment of a dentist, on behalf of Arkè, coordinate a time for the first appointment with the family and dentist, NO LATER THAN one week after receiving the assignment.** This is important because the dentist has other patients to treat and can only hold space available for a week. If, and only if, for serious reasons, the child cannot make the appointment, the family must telephone and inform the social worker 48/24 hours prior to the appointment. In case of tardiness or a missed appointment, the child will lose the right to the dental care.
- **When parents or guardians have the child in their care:** check the progress of the care through to its conclusion.

- **When parents do not have the child in their care:** enlist an educator or identify a trustworthy adult in the family who can escort the child to appointments. Explain the project and the rules to this person and give them a copy of the rules.
- **Report to Arkè any problematic situations** (for example, the parent has been unreachable through social services for months, a patient misses a dental appointment, or a patient uses a dentist independently over time without renewing the request for services with Arkè for follow-up appointments, and the like).
- **Send Arkè a request every time the child needs a dental visit,** and at least once a year for any child who has already participated in the program and needs periodic preventive checkups. The social worker should not call the dentist directly for subsequent visits as dentists participate in the program only when they can make room in their schedules and will inform Arkè when they are available and thus have given Arkè the responsibility to match patients with dentists.
- **Inform Arkè when a child transfers from living with the family to a protective facility.**

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND EDUCATORS TO:

- **Fill in the Indemnification Form (Manleva)** carefully and in detail, keeping in mind that the signature on the form confirms the acceptance of all of the rules and regulations shown on the form.
- **Meet with the responsible social officer** who will obtain the referral from Arkè to the assigned dentist who will be providing the free conservative care. The social worker will facilitate getting a date for the first visit based on times that are available in the dentist's appointment book.
- **Keep all appointments.** If there are exceptional and very serious reasons that the child cannot keep the appointment, the family must inform the dentist 48/24 hours in advance by phone. In case of delay or absence for an appointment, the child will lose the right to care. If the child is part of a nuclear family with other children who are to receive dental care, all of the children in the family will also lose their free care.
- **Accompany the patient (even if the patient is seventeen years old)** to all appointments, arrive in advance, and assure the patient is hygienically prepared for the visit. Make sure the patient understands that she or he must behave appropriately in the dentist's office and cannot bring pets, food, or beverages. We recommend that

patients leave cellphones at home. Cellphones, whether belonging to the patient or an adult companion, must be switched off before entering the dentist's office and cannot be used in any part of the office, including the waiting room.

- **Inform the dentist about the patient's general health and about any medical conditions** such as allergies, hepatitis, seropositivity, or AIDS. This information must be communicated to the dentist in a manner that respects guidelines for patient privacy. To this end, it would be useful for the patient to bring his or her health booklet to the appointment.
- **Understand that every dentist treats only one patient at a time from a given family**, unless the dentist is able to treat more than one sibling at the same time, has informed Arkè, and Arkè has informed the social worker. Only if a dentist is available to treat a number of siblings in the same family who were selected to get dental care, the siblings will be always scheduled one at a time. Once one sibling's treatment is complete, appointments can be scheduled for a second sibling, and so forth.
- **Contact Arkè through the social officer to set an appointment for a follow-up visit** about one year after finishing treatment. Patients must not go to the dentist's office without scheduling through Arkè, and when they do go, they must be accompanied by a parent or other trustworthy adult.
- **Do not ask the dentist for a specific service.** The dentist will decide on the necessary CONSERVATIVE CARE and will inform the patient and the parent or guardian about the treatment. [Note that this program does not include dental prosthesis, orthodontics, or cosmetic treatments.]
- An adult accompanying the child cannot ask the dentist for any free or fee-paying treatment for themselves or for others.
- **Communicate to Arkè when treatment is complete** so that Arkè can send another patient to the dentist.

A PATIENT LOSE THE RIGHT TO FREE TREATMENT FOR THESE REASONS:

- Repeatedly delaying going for treatment or not showing up for appointments
- Not following the dental-hygiene instructions the dentist provides to the patient following each treatment
- Not being accompanied by a parent, guardian, or other adult selected by the social worker
- Not seeing the dentist for any required follow-up visits

- The family has issues and concerns with the treatment or dentist and fails to communicate those concerns directly to Arkè rather than to the dentist.

ORTHODONTICS (CONSULTING AND ORTHODONTIC APPLIANCES)

The primary objective of Arkè is to provide the most important, conservative dental services, that is, services that treat and prevent oral diseases. Orthodontics is a very specialized treatment that is done after conservative dental treatment. It is often sought for aesthetic rather than functional reasons and requires frequent visits over one to three years. Up until 2013, Arkè dentists carried out about 500 orthodontia consultations and applied about 400 dental appliances, but this part of the program faced issues such as:

- A significant percentage of children and youth being treated have poor oral hygiene. Braces keep food in contact with teeth and are hard to clean. Poor oral hygiene with braces can lead to significant tooth decay and serious oral health problems. If a patient cannot maintain good oral hygiene, when their braces are removed, most of the teeth will have cavities.
- A significant number of patients who were given a removable dental device did not wear it continually, did not take proper care of it, lost it, or broke it.
- Many patients who were discharged from a secure facility and went back to their families with braces on their teeth, skipped their monthly monitoring appointments without informing the dentist's office, did not go to the dentist's office with an adult companion, or had other issues that adversely affected their treatment.
- Some foreign patients who had braces applied abroad, and then could not afford ongoing and needed appointments, asked Arkè to provide the needed care. Some who had braces put on their teeth in Italy returned to their native countries with those braces on without informing Arkè.

Because of these issues and to make the best use of the time our doctors generously donate, Arkè decided to discontinue orthodontics. The orthodontists who apply braces remain engaged for at least one year, sometimes for two or three. Over that amount of time, they could offer conservative care to many more children who would otherwise grow up missing teeth or having serious issues with the teeth they have. In fact, by concentrating on conservative care, Arkè is now using its resources to serve many more children.

Our dentists are volunteers who donate their time and skills free of charge do not receive money from Arkè or any other organization for their work helping needy children. They deserve all our support, respect, and deepest gratitude!