



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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American Recovery and Reinvestment Act support enables Dr. T.J. Morris to provide dental services in Atmore, Ala.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dr. T.J. Morris is engaged in the work he loves at his dental clinic at 111 E. Ridgely St. in Atmore, Ala., a fulltime practice made possible largely by tuition loan repayment assistance from the National Health Service Corps.

Atmore is located in a dental health shortage area, which is defined as an area where there are not enough dentists to serve the needs of patients in a particular geographic region.

After the death of Dr. Thomas Rice and the closure of another dental practice in Brewton, there was a definite need for dental services in Atmore. Dr. Morris learned about the opening through a dentist in Mobile.

With special permission granted by the Alabama Board of Dental Examiners, Morris was able to purchase the established practice from the estate of the late Dr. Rice. He said this would not have been possible without federal financial support because he had a sizeable student loan debt. Without the repayment assistance, he would not have qualified for additional loans.

For almost 40 years the National Health Service Corps has helped thousands of healthcare professionals practice in communities where they are most needed because of the financial assistance provided through student loan repayments and scholarships. Thanks to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, an additional \$300 million was allocated to assist more professionals with repayment of student loans.

Loan repayment opportunities are provided to approximately 100 providers in Alabama. Their disciplines include medical doctors, doctors of osteopathy, general practice dentists, primary care physician assistants, primary care nurse practitioners, clinical social workers, clinical psychologists, psychiatric nurse specialists, licensed professional counselors, and certified nurse midwives.

Morris (his full name is Terry Jack Morris, Jr., but he goes by T.J. to avoid confusion with his father) has treated both adults and children at the clinic since the spring of 2010. "I fell in love with the people and the community here," said Morris. "It has been a blessing from God to be able to serve these people, do what I love, and be compensated for it."

Morris is one of the few Medicaid providers in the tri-county area. He sees patients from neighboring counties, which is a big help to those who cannot afford to pay for dental care. Payments are charged on a sliding scale based on income, but no patient is turned away. Patients have shown their appreciation by offering him squash, fudge and homemade cakes.

“This is what God has called me to do,” he said. “I have never enjoyed working like this before.” Additional information about the National Health Service Corps loan repayment opportunities for healthcare professionals is available at www.adph.org/ruralhealth/ and by calling Dr. Charles Graves at 800-255-1992.

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