

HARRISBURG, Pa., Jan. 15, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- United Concordia Dental is transitioning from a traditional dental benefits provider to an innovative dental wellness company focused on the consumer.

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"This evolution in our business model is in direct response to a growing demand from consumers for cost-effective ways to maintain their health and well-being," said F.G. "Chip" Merkel, president and chief operating officer, United Concordia Dental. "It's also in response to the results of a three-year study we conducted of 1.7 million individuals who had Highmark medical coverage and our dental coverage. That study shows the impact oral health can have on the health of your body, as well as some pretty significant health care cost savings. We believe by focusing on dental wellness, we can help consumers achieve the better overall health they want – and science supports."

Based on customer feedback and its study findings, United Concordia has created a range of products and tools to help patients get the most from their dental benefits.

New elements of United Concordia's offerings include:

- [Developing the industry's first oral wellness product](#) offering enhanced periodontal coverage for certain dental procedures, including surgery.
- Creating targeted dental wellness programs that educate and empower consumers, enhance coordination between dental and medical providers and deliver lower health care costs.
- Building a free, [awarding-winning app called Chomper Chums™](#) that parents can use to help teach their young children proper brushing, flossing and rinsing behavior and good nutrition habits for life.
- Continuing to grow its dental network – already one of the nation's largest – to ensure access to high quality care.
- [Earning URAC accreditation](#) – one of the first dental carriers to do so – as a demonstration of its commitment to quality care for consumers. This designation means United Concordia has passed a rigorous, independent review of every aspect of its network operations, including network management, provider credentialing, utilization management, quality management and improvement, and consumer protection.
- Creating a user-friendly collection of online tools, including mobile apps, a responsive website, social media sites and cost estimator and assessment tools, so customers can engage with the company anywhere, anytime and on any device.

"The critical connection between the mouth and the body underscores the need for a more integrated approach to wellness," said James Bramson, D.D.S., chief dental officer, United Concordia Dental. "Through better coordination between dental and medical providers, we can deliver lower costs to consumers and promote better overall health. Our goal is help consumers understand that oral health is a missing piece in total body wellness. We hope consumers will view us as a partner they can turn to and depend on in their journey to wellness."

Data from United Concordia's landmark research, conducted under the leadership of renowned researcher and author Marjorie Jeffcoat, D.M.D., professor and dean emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine, showed [significant health care savings are possible](#) when individuals with various chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and rheumatoid arthritis, or who are pregnant, received and maintained treatment for their gum disease. This landmark, three-year oral health study showed:

- A dramatic drop in hospitalizations (33 percent) and doctor visits (13 percent) when gum disease is treated and managed.
- Health care cost savings of \$3,964, \$2,956, \$1,029 and \$2,430 for individuals with rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease and cerebrovascular disease, or who are pregnant, respectively.

While research shows a connection exists between gum disease and chronic conditions, a 2012 online survey by the American Dental Association (ADA) shows major gaps exist in consumer knowledge about the importance of oral health and hygiene.

"By bringing medical and dental together, we can help improve overall health, enhance the quality of care and lower costs for consumers," said Dr. Bramson. "It's not enough to merely understand the connection between oral and overall wellness. At United Concordia, we believe it's our mission – our responsibility – to ensure people understand and embrace the importance of oral health."

"In the coming months, United Concordia will continue to invest heavily in the products, technologies and tools essential to make managing dental benefits and overall wellness much easier for consumers," he added.

To learn more about United Concordia's transformation and focus on dental wellness, read ["It's All Connected: Guiding Consumers On A Wellness Journey."](#) or visit www.UnitedConcordia.com.

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