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**Statewide Organization to Honor Senator James Barnett with
an Excellence in Oral Health Award**

TOPEKA, KS - In recognition of his support and commitment to improving oral health for Kansans, Senator James Barnett was recently named by Oral Health Kansas as a recipient of an *Excellence in Oral Health* award.

During the 2007 Legislative Session, Senator Barnett championed a bill that increased the number of Kansans eligible for community-based dental hygiene services delivered by registered dental hygienists utilizing an Extended Care Permit (ECP). The services are designed to prevent oral diseases, or identify them early enough to ward off serious infections and pain. "The Senator's leadership on this bill was invaluable," said Sharon Tidwell, President of the Oral Health Kansas Board. "Many, many more vulnerable Kansans will receive preventive dental care because of the passage of this bill."

As a result of the 2007 expansion of the ECP law, hygienists may now service a wide range of Kansans in community settings, such as early childhood centers, schools, therapeutic centers for children with special needs or children in state custody, senior centers, senior housing, long-term care facilities and centers for adults with developmental disabilities. Hygienists with an ECP may also provide services to children, pregnant women, adults and seniors who are patients at local health departments or safety net clinics. Flint Hills Community Health Center in Emporia currently employs two ECP dental hygienists who provide services in the community.

In a 2005 report about the declining supply of dental services in Kansas, Kansas Health Institute (KHI) clearly showed that many poor and rural Kansans lag significantly behind an accepted standard of dental care and oral health, in part due to the limited number of dentists, especially in rural areas of the state. The report also showed that without policy intervention, the ratio of dentists to total population is expected to fall steadily and significantly through



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the year 2045. Registered dental hygienists with ECP's are now able to supplement the available number of dental services by offering prevention services outside the scope of the traditional dental office.

"We are fortunate to have had Senator Barnett's leadership in this effort. As a physician, he understands all too well that oral health is an important part of an individual's overall health that often gets overlooked. He also understands that too many Kansans do not have the benefit of routine dental care, something many of us take for granted," said Teresa Schwab, Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas. "Many Kansans are suffering with chronic infection and pain, inability to eat or the embarrassment that goes along with poor oral health. What is so frustrating is that oral disease is almost completely preventable. Dental care should not be considered a luxury, but a necessary part of an individual's overall health."

The award will be presented to Senator Barnett during the annual meeting of the Oral Health Kansas Board on Friday, December 14, 2007, at the Best Western in Emporia. The presentation will begin at approximately 12:15 p.m.

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Founded in 2003 as the statewide oral health coalition, Oral Health Kansas coordinates state-level policy initiatives focused on oral health prevention, access to dental care, oral health workforce, oral health status and leadership. The coalition's policy efforts focus on the most vulnerable Kansans, including children, pregnant women, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, those living in poverty and those living in rural areas of the state. Oral Health Kansas is a membership organization with over 200 members representing a diverse, multidisciplinary group of individuals and organizations, all working together to improve oral health in Kansas.

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