Dr. Bill Allen heard the call of Kenya’s underserviced citizens

Introducing Chronicle Honors/Henry Schein Cares, a spotlight on Canadian dentists who make a difference in the world.

A search for a novel experience prompted Dr. Bill Allen, a general dentist in Prince Edward Island, to provide dental care in underserviced areas of Kenya for the last four years.

"Nancy [his wife] and I have done our share of vacations over the years, and we were looking for something different than just lying on the beach somewhere," says Dr. Allen, 64, who now works as an associate in the Charlottetown-based practice that he formerly owned. "I was looking at various volunteer options through the Internet."

He attended a neighborhood meeting at a local church, held by an organization called Mkinduri Children of Hope, which is dedicated to providing medical services to people in need in Mkinduri, Kenya, a village with a population of about 6,000 that is located about four hours north of Nairobi.

"We came home from the presentation," recalls Dr. Allen. "I asked my wife what she thought about it, and she said, 'I don't know about you, but I'm going.'"

MANY PATIENTS HAD ORAL INFECTIONS

Four years later, Dr. Allen and his wife have been providing dental care on an annual basis in the village of Mkinduri. They have been paying their own way with each trip they take. Their annual trips are usually in February and make up the better part of the month, taking into account their travel time.

On his first trip, Dr. Allen surveyed the area to assess the primary needs in the community and the resources that existed.

"I had some concerns to go to a Third World country and extract teeth with no back-up [by oral surgeons] and not knowing what I was getting into," says Dr. Allen, who notes he was struck by the abject poverty he witnessed and the obvious signs of malnutrition.

He discovered that many patients had oral infections and abscessed teeth were common, so there was a great need for extraction of teeth, particularly the back molars.

"Most of the decay is in the back molars," says Dr. Allen. "My guess is that they love sugar cane. When they chew on it, they are biting using the back molars. There are no toothbrushes and no toothpaste. They clean their teeth using tree twigs. They clean their anterior or teeth and bicuspids, but they do not touch their molars. If you look at their front teeth as a whole, they look fine."

After the initial trip, he then knew what equipment and supplies needed to be brought over and looked to fellow dentists in the community to make donations and purchased supplies from the dental practice where he is an associate. Those supplies include OPTIMUM 33 TB Wipes, which are broad-spectrum sanitizing products, needles, anesthetic, gauge, forceps, elevators, and headlamps. He ensures that all equipment is sterilized prior to travel. While he works in Mkinduri, his wife is continually sterilizing equipment throughout the work day using a pressure cooker and propane stove. Not only are Mkinduri villagers treated, but villagers that are as far as five miles away wish to Dr. Allen's site to receive dental care.

"We treat the poorest of the poor," says Dr. Allen. "If you are well-off and can afford to see a dentist, we do not want to see you. We want to see those who have no access to care."

One of the developments has been that Dr. Allen works in collaboration with local Kenyan dentists while he is based in Mkinduri. A tent is set up with some chairs. While Dr. Allen sees about 30 patients a day and on average extracts

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