

## Dr. Bill Allen heard the call of Kenya's underserved 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 underserved 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 Mikinduri Children of Hope, which is dedicated to providing medical services to people in need in Mikinduri, 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 Mikinduri. 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



In a dental tent in Mikinduri, from left: Faith, a Kenyan volunteer, Dr. George Kariuki with patient, Nancy Allen, and Dr. Mercy Nthiori. Inset: Nancy Allen and Dr. Bill Allen.

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 teeth and bicuspid, 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 OPTIM 33 TB Wipes, which are broad-spectrum sanitizing products, needles, anesthetic, gauze, forceps, elevators, and headlamps. He ensures that all equipment is sterilized prior to travel. While he works in Mikinduri, his wife is continually sterilizing equipment throughout the work day using a pressure cooker and propane stove. Not only are Mikinduri villagers treated, but villagers that are as far as five miles away walk 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 Mikinduri. 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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Many dentists in Canada give freely of their time, talent, and expertise to humanitarian endeavors in this country and around the world. In this new series, DENTAL CHRONICLE provides a brief glimpse into the lives and motivations of some of these Canadian dentists, who will tell their stories of how they made the decision to provide dental care for underserved citizens in Kenya, Nicaragua, or Canada's north, to name just a few examples. Others will tell their stories of how they raise funds for similar projects, or how they provide supplies or used equipment. All would agree, the rewards of being involved in these projects far outweigh any inconveniences or problems encountered. These men and women set the example for community service. They go beyond national borders to carry out their mission, and you'll read their stories in upcoming issues of DENTAL CHRONICLE. Publication of this series is made possible by Henry Schein Canada.

"Henry Schein, with programs like the Back to School program, Think Pink, Give Kids a Smile, Holiday Cheer, and our Global Product Donation, supports the needs of community-based health professionals and NGOs," says Peter Jugoon, Vice President, Marketing and Planning, Henry Schein Canada. "As a responsible corporate citizen, Henry Schein has also initiated programs for humanitarian relief and disaster preparedness and response," providing supplies, expertise, and money for natural disasters such as the earthquake in New Zealand, the Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina.

"In this series called Chronicle Honors/Henry Schein Cares, we are honored to recognize some of the members of our Canadian dental community who are going above and

beyond the call of duty to help make this a better world," Jugoon says. "We would like the entire dental community to know that we are very proud and appreciative of their good work."



Jugoon