

Dental Field Trips: Sudan Dental “Qafla”

TEXT: Mawada AmirNawaf

Charity plus adventure, camping and oral health, learning through helping and sharpening clinical skills while having fun journeying on the countryside—these are all descriptive names for a great experience called projects for outreaching the nearby rural areas and also the far-away communities in need. For dentistry to become part of ordinary people’s lives we all—dental students and dentists—try to educate, spread the awareness, help people realize the importance of self-reliance oral care and show them the improvements of one’s life after successful treatment.

Doing something for the community

Sudanese dental students are trying to do the same in occasional organized group programs; as they take on their shoulders the responsibility to help the people who are for many reasons unable to come forward to get the oral care they should and deserve to have. The idea comes from the old saying “If you are not good to your people, you are no good to anyone!” So we try to be useful to our people! It is considered a magnificent experience for both parties, the working team and the targeted community. For many students benefits include social, clinical and personal aspects. Clinically lots of students make their first tooth extraction EVER at these Sudanese field trips. Surprisingly that even includes IADS former president: Tomaz Spindler!

These are obviously supervised extractions because dentists, young dentists and a lot of other experienced students are there!

Learning, Learning, Learning—in several ways

It is worth noting that bizarre cases were found during clinical work in number of situations including a six-rooted molar that would have been impossible to discover otherwise because the patient would have never come forward if the clinic hadn’t been reaching out to the community in his area! For the social aspect, students are found enjoying the days of their experience, strengthening their relationships and coming closer and closer to each other, strong friendships made through and deepened by field trips. And it’s funny

that some have even fallen in love and hooked up together only after such an experience! The students come back rejuvenated; they face the university and studying routine of everyday life with a better spirit because boredom was murdered during those trips!

Also exposing themselves—the students—to different cultures, different environments and dealing with different types of patients, enhances the social skills level and improves its quality. Students come back much more confident in terms of their clinical performance but also in terms of their own personal matters. They have more appreciation for the facilities available at the regular clinic but know that they can be skilful even in the absence of some great technologies. They realize that dentistry is a modernized science with the simple concept “The best work is working with your hands!” They are more comfortable in their surroundings at the faculty because they know more about their colleagues and in a better way, too.

Helping people in need

The targeted community is often pleasantly surprised to find so many dentists coming just to help them all. The people come to the clinics in huge numbers, which may sometimes reach hundreds and hundreds per day. They welcome the dental education they get and the oral health instructions they receive. They are mostly



co-operative as patients and warmly welcoming hosts toward the visiting team. They show students the true meaning of hospitality and the essence of the Sudanese spirit. Wealthy individuals would often invite the team for feasts, dinners and evening social gatherings. The care the patients receive includes but is not limited to periodontal, prosthetic, conservative care and extractions, as these types are represented by plenty of gingival scaling, simple fillings, simple acrylic removable

partial dentures (RPDs) and lots and lots of extractions. The patients receive dental and oral care never found before; they are now being examined for any oral lesions they may complain about, or even the non-painful asymptomatic lesions—the ones they don't know about! This then could play a desired role in the early discovery of suspected malignancies or pre-cancerous situations, which could be helped with early recognition. When an early proper diagnosis makes the whole difference, dental FIELD TRIPS do, too!

Emergencies and education

Suspectedly high-risked patients or patients in need for more or closer follow-up, or the patients require more facilities than available at the time: either for treatment or for testing and investigations, or patients are in need for surgery, or may require a more professional consultation.

They are all referred to the capital to one or more of our professors, to the hospital or the University of Khartoum (U of K), Faculty of Dentistry. People who come as patients are safe because in an emergency needed is there, with a well-trained emergency team that includes but is not confined to medical doctors as well as dental doctors. Educating those villagers is always fun as they mainly receive what you say with gratitude and big smiles and with a “teach me how and/or tell me what to do and I will do it” way. So by that simple smile from them you feel respected and appreciated in your efforts and therefore find yourself giving more than your maximum. They somehow bring the best out of you. Serious matters are sterilization and infection control measures because we consider them with extreme importance. They are very well taken care of in tight restrictions and to maintain the safety of





the team and the patients. It is never underestimated, but always well conducted.

Come and see for yourself

The journeys in the past few years included so many areas inside the Sudan toward all different geographical directions. They included trips to a lot of the Sudanese states. The number of patients treated at each single trip amazingly ranged between 500 to 3,500 patients. And a few years earlier one trip even reached 4,500 patients. Nevertheless, all patients receive all types of treatment as well as dentures as well as pharmacological drugs and analgesics, all free of charge. This brings great joy to the patients. Let me grab the opportunity and invite you all to the chance for discovery, the chance to amuse yourselves with such a learning experience. In fact, we are planning another international Sudanese out-

reaching dental field trip in our country. And you are all welcome to sign up for it. Do you want to have fun?! Fruitful fun?! Let me know! Let me know now!

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Mawada Amir Nawaf (BDS) is a Fresh Graduate of Faculty of Dentistry, University of Khartoum, comes from a country of warm-hearted people and warm weather. She served at many positions in Sudan both locally and internationally as National Exchange Officer and General Secretary. She is one of the founders of Basma "Smile" Oral Cancer Association for Charity. She has passion for traveling, loves experiencing new places and enjoys writing.

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