Dental diplomat brings relief to Afghanistan
An interview with Dr. James Rolfe, founder of the Afghanistan Dental Relief Project

Dr. Rolfe from Santa Barbara, Calif., works as a dentist in Afghanistan. (Photo/Provided by Dr. James Rolfe)

By Robin Goodman, Group Editor

Dr. Rolfe, please tell our readers about what led you to become involved with dentistry in Afghanistan?
I watched the people of Afghanistan as they were continually abandoned by the world; first when the Soviets invaded, later when they were defeated, and still later when the Taliban were ousted. Virtually no aid was getting to the people.

In 2003, I was told that we needed to forget about Afghanistan and support invading Iraq, as a matter of national security. I had to do something. In September 2003, I flew to Wardak Province in Central Afghanistan with portable equipment and worked in an orphanage at an elevation of 11,000 feet for three weeks. I would treat an orphan, and he would become my assistant. Working through the 40 or so orphans, I found that about 85 percent had the ability to work in dentistry.

Then I started seeing people from the surrounding cities. I saw many people who were literally on the street. Then I looked at the implants being used in Iraq and realized that these were not being used in Afghanistan because they were not available. The implants were available in Afghanistan, but the money was not there to purchase them.

The compromised implant site solution

The use and acceptability of implants today is considered both routine and highly predictable. With that, people more than ever before are considering the replacement of missing teeth by this method. Unfortunately, until now, a segment of this population has not been viewed as a viable candidate, particularly patients with compromised situations having to do with limited interdental spaces, advanced bone loss, convergent roots, age and financial constraints.

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