‘Filling the gap’ in Afghanistan

A unique dental program in Afghanistan is saving lives, raising the infrastructure level and bringing about social change for women and orphans.

Imagine that you have a dental problem, a toothache. The tooth is painful and getting more intense. What would be your best course of action?

Most people would be very concerned and want to contact a dentist to arrange for prompt treatment. You might be given antibiotics and pain medication, and your great concern would be lessened knowing that you had access to proper care.

In another country, you might not be as fortunate. You would know that no treatment was possible because there were no dentists. So you would resign yourself to endure the pain, as you had done in the past, and hope for the best. Or you might access a barber, who would take the tooth out without anesthetic.

No thought of antibiotics or pain medication would cross your mind, as these things are not available, either. All of your life you had lived in poverty, along with your neighbors and fellow villagers, with hardly enough to eat. You had never owned a toothbrush in all your life.

This country is Afghanistan.

Afghan health

Ninety percent of Afghans, 29 million people, have never seen a dentist. With only 134 dentists, each dentist would have to serve a quarter million people. However, dentists congregate in big cities, and rural areas have no access to care. Ninety percent of the Afghan population live in rural areas that are completely unserved by dentistry.

Dental conditions left untreated lead to eventual pulp necrosis and chronic infection. This is a progressive condition, eventually leading to multiple abscessed teeth and, in some cases, a systemic septicemia infection that is lethal.

Many people in Afghanistan die from their teeth problems. But now, there is hope for the dental needs of Afghanistan.

Go ahead, take a bite. A big dental bite of the Big Apple awaits, and this year’s Greater N.Y. Dental Meeting promises to be even bigger than previous years. Get the details about who, what and when, as well as some tips that will help you make the most of the city when you aren’t at the dental meeting. (Photo/David Watts Jr., www.dreamstime.com)

Fish fights gum disease

Recently published research suggests that polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), found in foods such as fatty fish and nuts, will help keep people’s smiles healthy, as they have been shown to help lower the risks of gum disease and periodontitis.

The research examined the diet of 182 adults between 1999 and 2004, and found that those who consumed the highest amounts of fatty acids were 30 percent less likely to develop gum disease and 20 percent less likely to develop periodontitis.

Lead researcher of the study, Dr. Asghar Z. Naqvi of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre in Boston, said: “We found that n-3 fatty acid intake, particularly docosahexaenoic acid [DHA] and eicosapentaenoic acid [EPA] are inversely associated with periodontitis in the U.S. population.

To date, the treatment of periodontitis has primarily involved mechanical cleaning and local anti-
‘Fatty fish and nuts have been shown to help lower the risks of gum disease and periodontitis.’

(Photo/www.sxc.hu)

Members of the public are invited to take a trip into the not-so-distant past to discover childhood toys with a toothy twist. “Open Wide! Toothy Toys that Made Us Smile” is on view at the National Museum of Dentistry. The exhibit features more than 50 objects, ranging from the original Yakiti Yak chatter teeth created in 1949 to Cabbage Patch dolls with teeth from the 1980s.

From Play Doh’s Dr. Drill-n-Fill to Barbie Dentist to an Evel Knievel battery-operated toothbrush complete with launching ramp, visitors to the museum can see games, dolls, puzzles and character toothbrushes. The exhibit also features a playable Tooth Invaders video game from 1981 and a hands-on game corner where visitors can try their hand at classic dental themed games such as Crocodile Dentist and Mr. Mouth.

“Times change, and toys reveal what was important to us during certain times in our history,” said Carter. “Most people suffer from gum disease at some point in their life. What people tend not to realize is that it can actually lead to tooth loss if left untreated, and in this day and age, most people should be able to keep all their teeth for life.

This study shows that a small and relatively easy change in people’s diet can massively improve the condition of their teeth and gums, which in turn can improve their overall wellbeing.”

The study was published in the November issue of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association: Naqvi et al. “n-3 Fatty Acids and Overall Wellbeing.”

(Phot/Provided by the National Museum of Dentistry)

Tell us what you think!

Do you have general comments or criticism you would like to share? Is there a particular topic you would like to see more articles about? Let us know by e-mailing us at feedback@dental-tribune.com.

If you would like to make any change to your subscription (name, address or to opt out) please send us an e-mail at database@dental-tribune.com and be sure to include which publication you are referring to. Please note that subscription changes can take up to 6 weeks to process.

‘Toothy’ toys at National Museum of Dentistry

These vintage toys are on display at the National Museum of Dentistry. (Photo/Provided by the National Museum of Dentistry)

(Phot/Provided by the National Museum of Dentistry)
the Afghan people.

The tragedy of Afghanistan

More than 50 years of war have made Afghanistan into a desperate place. The nation is filled with pov-
erty and hardship. More than 5 million orphans search for some kind of meaningful future. Widows and single mothers are everywhere, begging in the streets, trying to survive.

So many adults have died that the average age is only 14. Due to the great challenges of just staying alive, 70 percent of young children die before the age of 5. The birth/death rate is the highest of any nation in the world.

Twenty children a month are killed or maimed by mine explo-
sions. Many children are affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, and the party of older children feel that life is not worth living. But there is hope. And that hope lies in education.

Inspiration for change

The Afghan Dental Relief Proj-
et was founded in 2005 following a visit to the Central Highlands
province of Wardak. Taking 500 pounds of portable equipment to an orphange at 11,000 feet elevation, Dr. Joseph Rolfe of Santa Barbara, Calif., spent three weeks treating the orphan boys there. He would first treat one of them, and then he would have the patient become his assistant.

Rolfe discovered that around 85 percent of the boys were fast learn-
ers and adapted well to the chal-
lenges of dental assisting. Seeing
that the boys had no future without education, he imagined training them to be professionals.

A leader in the field of dental hygiene and education, he imagined training
the orphan boys there. He would
make oral hygiene part of their future now are able to determine
their health and longevity.

In August 2009, the full-service
clinic was founded in 2003 following
the work to Pakistan for a questionable
venture. The women’s prison as well.

Making social change

The educational program has opened up new opportunities for
these students. Orphans with no future now are able to determine
their own lives as productive indi-
viduals. Women from the Afghan
Dental Relief Project (ADRP) pro-
gram have become authority figures
in a male-dominated society. Many
of the students, endure hardships in order to attend the school. They are extremely dedi-
cated, always coming early and
working hard to master the tech-
nical material.

In 2007, the Kabul School of Dental
Technology opened and now dentists throughout Afghanistan have a reliable
resource for their crowns and den-
tures, rather than sending their
work to Pakistan for a questionable
product. Recently, a chrome partial
casting machine was added to the
dental laboratory, which will soon
allow production of chrome frame-
wearing crowns and dentures.

One-hundred percent of all donations go directly to the support of our project. We have no salaried employees, and we all pay our own expenses. You can become

What you can do

With a little change, you can make
a big change. One-hundred percent
of all donations go directly to the support of our project. We have no salaried employees, and we all pay our own expenses. You can become

A member by joining ADRP with a monthly contribution that will help support the work in the clinic and in the school.

Help build a permanent facility on the present clinic site and move the shippable clinic to another town so that we can begin another train-
ing site in that town to benefit the local residents. You can give a child complete dental care for $15.

We need donated supplies, instruments and equipment. Den-
tists are encouraged to contrib-
ute their gold scrap to the project, where it can be recycled to provide funding for supplies and operating expenses.

We all became dental profession-
als because we love doing dentistry; let’s experience the joy of using that knowledge and skill without a fee, for the good of mankind.

Donations are tax-deductible, as ADRP is a 501(c)3 non-profit orga-
nization. Donations can be sent to ADRP, 51 E. Canon Perdido St., Santa Barbara, Calif., 93101.

For more information, please visit the website www.adrpinc.org or e-mail the headquarters at
adrp@earthnet.net. Rolfe can also be contacted at (805) 965-2529.

(Source: Afghan Dental Relief Project)