



The students, dental residents and faculty are part of BOCA, Buffalo Outreach and Community Assistance. They take with them all of their supplies as well as oral hygiene tools to give to the members of the communities that they help.

UB students travel, provide dental aid

Changing the world, *one mouth at a time*

by ELIZABETH TAUFA
Reporter

What do you do if you have a toothache? You call a dentist, make an appointment and receive the necessary attention.

But what if you didn't have that option? What if a dentist were nowhere to be found? What if you had never even been to a dentist?

A concerned group of dental students at the University at Buffalo's School of Dental Medicine have started a program to address just this problem in countries around the world.

The program is called BOCA, or the Buffalo Outreach and Community Assistance, and its sole purpose is to send dental students, residents and faculty to underprivileged countries — including Ghana, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala — to perform free dental work on residents who might otherwise never see a dentist.

"We take about 20 students every time we go," said Carrie Wanamaker, who is the student president of BOCA. "People line up by the hundreds outside of the clinics every day that we're there."

According to Wanamaker, most of the people the group sees have never visited a dentist and are in unrelieved pain from dental-related problems. The group is mostly forced to pull teeth but can also provide fillings for cavities, even though those are more time consuming. The group is unable to perform root canals or make dentures or caps due to



Dental students from UB take yearly trips to underdeveloped nations to perform dental work on those who need it most.

time constraints and a lack of funding and materials.

"We just do what we can so they aren't in pain anymore," she said. "We can give fillings to children if it's a small cavity in their permanent teeth, but the adult teeth are usually more decayed. We try to restore front teeth because those teeth are usually more important to people."

She noted that the group has provided more than \$1 million in dental services since its inception in 2003. Last year, the group treated 1,761 patients; filled 907 cavi-

ties and extracted 926 teeth, work valued at more than \$300,000 based on standard charges in American dentistry.

Wanamaker said that the group also takes toothbrushes and toothpaste, as well as instructions for oral hygiene so that those who seek help can perhaps develop better oral health.

Although they are not physicians, members of the group have also taken medicine to treat urinary tract infections, as well as antibiotics, acne cream and topical creams for parasites. Wanamaker said the

group is looking to expand the trips to include medical students and residents to address more of these medical concerns.

As far as her personal experiences, Wanamaker said that seeing how people in these countries live was shocking.

"It's hard to see kids with their teeth rotting out and knowing how much pain they're in," she said. "Imagine having a toothache and then multiply it times 10, and that's how bad it is."

The funding for the trips to the various countries is costly

and money is scarce, so the group has turned to fundraising.

The group's top fundraiser is its annual Caribbean Night, which will be held this year at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 3 at the Buffalo Launch Club on Grand Island. The event will feature Caribbean food, a cash bar, music by "Buddha-hood" and a silent auction of donated items and gift certificates.

Tickets cost \$15 for students, \$25 for the general public and \$30 for dentists.

The group is always in need of donations of both money and supplies.

"Doctors offices can donate gloves and gauze and cotton, which we need because gauze is our only method for suction during oral surgery," she said.

Medications for lice and scabies are also needed, as well as antibiotics and generic pain killers, like Tylenol, as long they have not expired and are in their original containers.

"People know that medical care is needed in other parts of the world, but they forget about how important dental care is," Wanamaker said. "In America, we take things like having a dentist for granted. Not everyone has that advantage."

For more information on BOCA, to donate or to find out more about Caribbean Night, visit the group's Web site online at <http://student.sdm.buffalo.edu/boca> or e-mail Wanamaker at cw72@buffalo.edu.

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