

BRIDGE TO HEALTH

MEDICAL | DENTAL

<http://bridgetohealth.ca>



Bridge to Health Medical and Dental is a dynamic organization providing sustainable, cost effective health care to underserved populations. We achieve our objectives by following the principals of primary health care: accessibility, appropriate technology, community participation, prevention and health promotion, and inter -professional collaboration.

Currently, *Bridge to Health* works in the Kabale region of southwestern Uganda in partnership with KIHEFO, a local not for profit organization who focuses on HIV/AIDS, maternal health, malnutrition, and oral health. Uganda is one of the world's poorest nations, with a highly

vulnerable population with limited access to health care, clean water, sanitation, food and education. According to the Ugandan Medical and Dental Practitioners Council, there are an estimated 200 dentists and approximately 500 dental officers in the entire country. Of these only 50% work in clinical settings. Currently in the Kigezi region there is only one dentist for a population of 1.2 million residents.

On its fourth visit (in 2016), Bridge to Health spent eight days in eight different rural communities. Approximately 3,000 patients attended our health clinics, 800 of which were treated for dental needs. Dental health treatment included over 1,000 extractions, minor restorative treatments, 350 debridements, 500 applications of fluoride varnish and an innovative prosthodontic program which delivered same day dentures.



The prosthodontic program was initiated with the support of several dental companies (Avadent and Dentsply) who graciously supported this initial endeavor. In past years, we spent much time on pain control and management of infection by way of extraction, but this year we focused some of our energies on tooth replacement with removable dentures. This service is one that would never be available to the communities that we treated. Our team, over the course of the brigade, fabricated upwards of 50 partial and complete dentures using light cured



materials combined with conventional denture teeth (Genios). This extraordinarily rare treatment to the Ugandan villagers, quickly became a very popular service. The team witnessed not only physical but also emotional transformations as patients were boasting full smiles by the end of each clinical day. This gave us a very different perspective from what we were used to.

All patients who needed extraction and pain management were seen however there so many patients needing prosthodontic services that they had to be prioritized. It was difficult turning people away at triage because we had already chosen the patients that would be seen that day. Resources were limited as was time. The patients who were rejected did not complain, they just started walking to the next village

where we would be the next day and hope that they could be seen then. Preparations for this coming year's program have therefore taken on a different form with increased personnel as well as increased abilities to provide prosthodontic services. Our goal is to not turn away patients who need to have their smiles returned to them.



One of the fundamental aspects of our approach to global health care is knowledge exchange. We take senior dental students who gain first-hand knowledge of the global challenges in accessing oral health care. Through this direct involvement, they develop a cross cultural understanding unique to Uganda's south western region, a keen understanding of the limitations in oral health care delivery to resource poor settings and have an opportunity to develop their clinical skills. They work with experienced Canadian, American and Ugandan dental health professionals and have the opportunity to learn unique skills specific to field work.

Key to our success is our ability to engage local dental officers. This allows us the opportunity to provide hands on training and conduct workshops on techniques as well as topics of interest to the officers, fostering a sense of connection to the global dental professional community.



In each community, *Bridge to Health*, in collaboration with the local health care professionals, delivers oral health education to approximately 300 school children, community leaders and teachers. The focus is based on the availability of oral care tools, nutrition, and oral health correlation to systemic health. We discuss the simple formula to tooth decay → **PLAQUE + SUGAR + TEETH = TOOTH DECAY**, and provide alternatives regarding nutrition and daily brushing to maintaining a caries free state. A correlation between

nutrition, oral health and systemic health is emphasised and usually creates great interest from the adults. Throughout the presentations we encourage questions and sharing experiences, giving participants an opportunity to discuss challenges, and develop resolutions as a group. Each community and the NGO are provided with teaching posters and a typodont to incorporate oral health into their curriculum and continue to promote prevention in periodical outreaches.

In the past year, we introduced a fluoride varnish program to community children. The program enables dental officers to apply a second treatment when on outreach, and at the KIHEFO dental clinic.

Oral health education and awareness, through our program, has positively impacted the community, with dental officers seeing an increase in patients seeking oral health care. The NGO continues to provide services in outreach, as well as in the KIHEFO dental clinic. Bridge to Health continues to advocate on behalf of KIHEFO in maintaining full functioning of the clinic in Kabale.

We would like to thank our volunteers and supporters for their continued involvement as we strive to make a long-term investment in this community and work to empower our local partner to build capacity for a sustainable solution to healthcare.



Bridge to Health will embark on the fifth outreach to this region in February 2017, building on the efforts we have made since first visiting Kabale in 2013. Our outreach program promoting inter-professional practice is reflected in our growing team, comprised of medical doctors, dentists, nurses, dental hygienists, dental assistants, eye care specialists, and chiropractors. As we expand into future sites, the continued support of our dental community is greatly needed and appreciated. Forums of this kind deliver the message of need, awareness and support to all in global servicing.



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