Dental Outreach to Egypt

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Anyone who is fascinated by history dreams of experiencing Egypt and we were delighted to participate on three dental/medical mission trips established through church connections. We desired: 1) to open doors to cultural and faith-based understanding and exchange, 2) to improve local dental practices, 3) to leave a lasting, sustainable dental impact, and 4) to adventurously explore a unique place in the world.





Our team leader, an Egyptian physician, requested a medical/dental team, as well as laborers to help build several $1200 Habitat for Humanity homes in rural villages--simple, durable, 800 sq. ft. homes that Christians and Muslims build together. (*Left: Helping with building a wall with Habit for Humanity in Muslim village to build trust before being allowed to do dentistry. Right: Dr. Bob trains an Egyptian Dentist in Aswan, Egypt with a 400-pound patient on a 15 pound portable dental chair.)*

A little room on a top floor became our dental clinic and a local dentist arrived to spend the first morning with us. We were flattered when he stayed until we departed. The Egyptian dentist, sharply dressed with an impressively bright mind, loved the professional interaction. He translated and watched the procedures closely. It seemed that the local dentist was bringing us all of his difficult patients. He wanted us to work on him as well, since we'd discovered that rarely, outside of larger cities, did dental providers sterilize their instruments—a huge shock to us, but a reality in most developing countries of the world.



Dr. Bob trains Egyptian Dentist, Egyptian Physician and Finnish nurse in an outlying Nubian medical clinic in Southern Egypt.

As Diane remarked then, "Teaching dentistry is what you do best, Bob, but our most valuable contribution could be our sterilization information! Who would imagine that?" Diane thrilled to the opportunity the next day of training the Egyptian dentist's office assistant in the use of our simple $42, four-quart pressure pot that runs on a small electric hot plate, with a cup of water poured in to provide steam. It's a certified portable steam autoclave. With a Christian Dental Society innovation—a two-inch round weight—we can bring the steam pressure up to twenty-four pounds per square inch, with a sterilization time of ten minutes. This dental practice-changing method would hopefully spread through the network of this professional Egyptian dentist. (ADI has an article about pressure pot sterilization on the website: Click HERE The Christian Dental Society www.christiandental.org makes available: Letter of Instruction for Pressure Pot Sterilization and Letter of Certification to Validate the Pressure Pot for Sterilization.

After two days in the Christian village, our Habitat for Humanity team took us to a Muslim village. When we arrived, the local officials ushered us into a meeting room where they questioned our motives over tea, which seemed formal and daunting. The village leaders had apprehensions about foreigners providing dentistry that first day, so we started hauling blocks with the team, and helped build foundations and walls. The second day

the Muslim community leaders met us at the bus and asked if we would bring our dental equipment in—we had gained their trust!

As we left the Muslim village several days later, one of the tall, intimidating leaders who'd been involved with the leadership tea the first day said, "You are the first American Christians I had met. At first I hated you and disagreed with you. But now that we have worked together and talked together, I feel differently. You have become part of us—we would now die for you!" This is a common sentiment when loyalty has been built in the Muslim world. Once they have committed to a friendship, they will fight to the death to defend their allies. We'd become comrades in their eyes. Once again we felt humbled as we pondered the difference several days of caring makes in changing the distrust and bias of others. We've been amazed at how little it takes to bring affirming and positive progress on both sides of a seemingly wide cultural abyss. As we said our goodbyes to the Muslim villagers, they honestly seemed sad to see us go. In that short time, we'd all been impacted deeply through working for a common cause in friendship.

American and Egyptian dentists training together in Aswan Egypt.



"Do I ever have a hospital that needs you in Aswan, a beautiful paradise on the Nile, south of Cairo!" Our Egyptian physician enticed us once again. We also saw a significant purpose and dual incentive, since the hospital staff asked if we'd set up a dental clinic on site for an Egyptian dentist that would remain there. We love to train and interact with a local professional who will stay on location, and it also gave us the opportunity to leave a permanent, operational clinic. Our church in Colorado Springs expressed interest in allotting money from their missionary fund to help equip and set up a dental clinic which would service the hospital and two outlying clinics. Our portable clinic concept seemed perfect for the setting, and through the $5,000 gift from our church, we bought a portable chair, dental operating unit, dental light, sterilization equipment, and some supplies and instruments. We solicited donations for many additional materials, generously given by American dental organizations.

Dr. Brad, from America, trains young Egyptian Dentists with the portable dental clinic in a Nubian medical clinic in Southern Egypt.



By 9:00 a.m. the first morning we'd set up in a small room with a sink, and began teaching Dr. Deira, the female, Egyptian dentist. We felt gratified to treat the hospital staff, since they faithfully give their best care to others, often neglecting or unable to seek healthcare themselves. Dental care in Aswan is almost non-existent and local dentists did not always utilize sterilization practices as noted above. Almost every medical provider in the hospital presented with infected teeth requiring extractions or fillings, a reality seen most places in a world where 90% of people have no access to reasonable dentistry. In fact, on the continent of Africa where Egypt resides, overall the dentist to patient ratio is around 1:100,000.



German Mission Hospital in Aswan, Egypt. Dr. Bob and Diane participating on a medical and dental training with Europeans, Americans, and Egyptians.

Dr. Deira told us she most wanted to learn restorative procedures. She was skilled at extracting teeth, as that was her job every day at a government facility—although she claimed they didn't even have an operating hand-piece at her hospital clinic. She pulls one tooth on each patient and charges the equivalent of a dollar, providing for many patients in a day. Several days

later, Dr. Deira proudly showed us her private office, a small room on the second floor of a corner building in her village. Her antique equipment, although organized and clean, included a minimal number of instruments and limited supplies. To her credit, she did use an old-fashioned sterilizing machine. After she completed her daily work for the government, she radiated caring and concern for the patients she saw on her own time.

We went once more to Egypt, with two other dentists we recruited, just before the revolution that would change Egypt forever. The Aswan hospital, for whatever reason, hadn't utilized Dr. Deira, the Egyptian we'd trained on our previous visit a year prior or the portable dental clinic we had left. They'd asked three other young, inexperienced Egyptian dentists to join us this time, and Dr. Deira came as well. The dentists delighted in sharing professionally, and promised to take turns providing dental services to the hospital and in surrounding villages.



The hospital did hire Dr. Deira to care for patients in the outlying clinics, and the other Egyptian dentists have joined short-term trips. Our training and equipping aspect of the trip turned out exceptionally well and, at this writing, Dr. Deira and nine other dentists have used the equipment to provide care in remote areas.

Team members teach oral hygiene instruction to Nubian Muslims in Southern Egypt.

One German volunteer at the hospital, a dear older man named Klaus, bore an uncanny resemblance to St. Nicholas. He planned to soon depart for Sudan with a team from the church in Aswan. When we asked him if it was dangerous to go into Sudan, he looked very soberly at us and said, "Humph, it is also very hazardous to be in Germany, as people are dying daily in their beds…" and then his eyes twinkled as he added, "…some possibly never having really lived!" That's become one of our sayings, as we take risks and find significance in serving others around the world.

We mused later that there is always a lot to admire about other cultures, and we come away wishing we could incorporate some features into our lifestyle. We especially enjoyed the feeling of social connectedness we observed in Egypt, notably expressed in the closeness of intergenerational and extended families. The main

form of recreation seemed to be a warm emphasis on socializing, where people are out and about visiting with family and friends.



Adventure of riding camels around the pyramids with dental/medical team.

Our trips to Egypt also fulfilled our desire to adventurously experience a renowned destination of the world. In Cairo we served a day in a Sudanese refugee school, watching delightedly as the children received "shoeboxes of love" packed by caring Americans at Christmastime. We saw the impressive Egyptian Museum (where the ancient mummies all had significant dental problems), several palaces, the immense Aswan Dam, and astounding mosques. We rode camels around the pyramids, and enjoyed a Nile cruise to many ancient cities. A papyrus-making demonstration in an art store, beautiful carpets, and other shopping venues were unique.



All of our goals had been met through our interaction with the amazing country of Egypt, a pattern we've experienced on over 60 missions in the past 20 years. Please read further details of this trip and others in our books, *Truth, Teeth & Travel, Volumes 1 and 2.* For instructions on "how-to" lead or participate on a short-term portable dental mission, obtain specifics in our *Dental Mission Manual: For Portable, Short-Term Dental Trips.*

Sudanese Refugee children in Cairo receiving "Shoe Boxes of Love."