U.S. team establishes dental lab in Tanzania

Miracle Corners of the World (MCW), a U.S.-based non-profit organization, recently sent a team from the United States to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to inspect and oversee the installation of state-of-the-art dental laboratory equipment. The initiative was part of a second Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in October 2010 between MCW and the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS).

The project builds on an earlier MOU, signed in September 2008, devoted to bringing the MUHAS School of Dentistry and MCW together to collaborate on an oral health-care initiative supported by in-kind donations by private sector companies. Tanzanian President H.E. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete and leadership from the Ministry of Health have supported the project from the beginning.

Dr. Paulo Sarita, former head of restorative dentistry, made a compelling argument to Dr. Marion Bergman, MCW’s director of health-care projects. In a proposal submitted to MCW by the dental school...
April was Oral Cancer Awareness Month, and thanks to the efforts of the American Dental Association (ADA), the Oral Cancer Foundation (OCF) and hundreds of ordinary dentists throughout the country, patients everywhere were able to get screened for the life-threatening disease. In all, more than 1,250 practices across the nation registered their screening events with the OCF.

Although many dentists perform oral cancer screenings as a routine part of examinations, the ADA encouraged dentists to perform community outreach during the week of April 11-15 to provide free oral cancer screenings to people who might not regularly visit a dentist, according to ADA spokesperson William Van Vort, a professor of oral medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

“Early detection is critical in increasing survival rates for patients who have developed an oral cancer, and recognizing and managing precancerous lesions is extremely important in prevention,” Silverman said.

One practice, the Gentle Dental Group, with offices throughout Florida, uses the VelScope Oral Cancer Screening System as a tool in detection of the disease.

“The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada recently cleared the VelScope System for assisting dentists and hygienists in discovering cancerous and precancerous growths that may not be apparent to the naked eye.”

With the VelScope System, a dental professional can screen for oral cancer in one to two minutes during a conventional examination or during a common procedure such as teeth whitening.

Dr. Neal Ziegler, chief dental officer of the Gentle Dental Group, says his practice has always conducted annual comprehensive oral cancer screening as part of the routine dental exam. He said that oral cancer is typically discovered in the late stages of development, when the five-year survival rate is only 22 percent.

“By detecting potential problems earlier, we’ll be providing our patients with the best defense against oral cancer currently available,” Ziegler said. “Gentle Dental Group is deeply committed to providing the best dental care available for its patients, including the latest technology and techniques.”

Brian Hill, the executive director of OCF and an oral cancer survivor, also stressed the importance of early detection and the important role that dentists play.

“Early detection is important because it reduces treatment-related morbidity and improves survival rates,” Hill said.

In 2010, the National Cancer Institute estimated that approximately 36,540 people were diagnosed with oral cancer and approximately 7,880 people died of oral cancer. The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) estimated that the five-year survival rate for people diagnosed early, when the disease has not spread beyond the original location, is approximately 85 percent compared to a 20 percent survival rate for those who were diagnosed when the cancer has spread to other organs.

This year, approximately 37,000 Americans will be newly diagnosed with oral cancer, and one person will die every hour of every day from this disease, according to the OCF. HPV16, one of about 150 versions of the virus, is now the leading cause of oral cancer, and is found in about 60 percent of newly diagnosed patients, the OCF reports.

In 2010, The Journal of the American Dental Association published “Evidence-based Clinical Recommendations Regarding Screening for Oral Squamous Cell Carcinomas,” which was developed by an expert panel convened by the ADA Council on Scientific Affairs. The panel’s report concluded that clinicians should remain alert for signs of potentially cancerous lesions while performing routine visual and tactile examinations in all patients during dental appointments.

Risk factors for mouth and throat cancers include tobacco use, heavy consumption of alcohol, particularly when they are used together, as well as infection with the human papillomavirus, which is better known as HPV.

“In a painless, three to five-minute oral cancer screening, most of the signs and symptoms of oral cancer can be seen with the naked eye, felt with the fingers or elucidated during the patient’s oral history interview,” said Dr. Ross Kerr, an oral medicine specialist at New York University College of Dentistry.

More information is available online, at www.oralcancer.org.
The Dental Trade Alliance has been honored with an award for its significant contributions to Donated Dental Services (DDS), a program of Dental Lifeline Network. The award was accepted by Gary Price as DDS celebrated its 25th anniversary during the recent 2011 National Association of Dental Laboratories Vision 21 Meeting in Las Vegas.

Presenting the award was Dental Lifeline Network President Fred Leviton. Formerly known as the National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped, Dental Lifeline Network is a charitable affiliate of the American Dental Association. Through DDS and other programs, the organization provides comprehensive dental care to people with disabilities or who are elderly or medically at-risk and has a nationwide volunteer network of 15,000 dentists and 3,200 laboratories that contribute more than $22 million worth of needed services annually, including nearly $2 million in fabrications.

"Without the outstanding support of the DTA, DDS could never have reached today's milestone of providing dental therapies valued at $187 million to 101,000 people in 50 states," Leviton noted. "The DTA has been instrumental in linking us with the dental trade industry, providing incalculable value in our ability to serve the needs of vulnerable people nationwide. We are profoundly grateful to the alliance, its foundation and to our colleagues in the industry."

In addition to serving vulnerable individuals with disabilities or who are elderly or medically at-risk and have a nationwide volunteer network of 15,000 dentists and 3,200 laboratories that contribute more than $22 million worth of needed services annually, including nearly $2 million in fabrications.

"The DTA is invaluable in providing resources to help us address an increasing need for dental care among vulnerable people with acute medical conditions and dental disease," said Leviton.