Vanuatu

Dental Care

Location
Vanuatu

Partner
Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

The Situation
For the 80% of people in Vanuatu who live in rural villages access to healthcare services is very limited. For most people seeing a doctor is a rare experience and dental care is either minimal or non-existent. The dentist/population ratio is 1:34,812, while the comparable figure for Australia is 1:1,910.

The Port Vila Hospital provides a dental service to the local population, but it is under-resourced and over-worked, as well as being out of reach to those who live off the main island of Efate. Whilst “Western Style” dental services do exist in Port Vila they are beyond the reach of all but the wealthy.

There is a proven link between poor dental care and a range of other medical complications and diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and infection. In addition, the increasing adoption of a high-sugar, Western diet amongst the local population is placing a greater focus on the need for education and awareness about ways to reduce the incidence of tooth decay and poor oral hygiene.

The Project
The Vanuatu Dental Care Program is a new and exciting initiative which will operate alongside the successful Prevention of Blindness Program as part of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu’s broader health program.

The project will provide low cost, non-traditional dental services that build skills and capacity at the local village and community level with an emphasis on Education, Prevention and Treatment.

The program is long term, with the Education and Prevention components designed to bring about cultural change in oral health to accompany Vanuatu’s increasingly sugar-rich diet and its associated tooth decay and gum disease.

The Treatment component will be delivered by locally trained Dental Health Practitioners using ART (Atraumatic Restorative Treatment), a low-cost tooth filling procedure specially designed for developing countries. Treatment will also be offered by a roster of volunteer Australian dentists.

The program is designed to be a “structure” within which other more ad...
Hoc volunteer dental assistance might be channeled in a systematic manner to ensure all Vanuatu villages, no matter how remote, receive some form of dental care.

The program will offer training and resourcing to Government Health Practitioners in the Dental Care Program, enabling them to teach the Education and Prevention elements, while also administering the ART Treatment.

Due to the strong links between poor oral health in new mothers and the health and welfare of their babies, a particular focus of the Dental Care service will be pregnant women and young women generally.

The Future

The objective for this project is for the Dental Care Program to be fully staffed by local (Ni-Van) health workers, some of whom have completed the Dental Surgery qualification at the Fiji National University.

In the short term, however, a roster of visiting volunteer dentists will be recruited to provide the program with a high degree of ongoing clinical rigour mentoring and oversight required.

The program will be based out of the newly constructed Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu’s Port Vila health facility. The aim is to reach all populated islands over a 3-5 years period.

Get Involved

The Dental Care Program invites interest from volunteer dentists willing to devote one or more weeks to working in the field.

We also invite you to get involved with the project by supporting the work financially, praying for the success of the project and receiving regular updates.

Contact UnitingWorld

Address: PO Box A2266
Sydney South NSW 1235
Phone: +61 2 8267 4267
Web: www.unitingworld.org.au

Yes, I'd like to help provide dental care for rural communities in Vanuatu.

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