

Kimberley Dental Team E- Flyer 6. September 2010

Dear Kimberley Dental Team and supporters,

In August, KDT returned for our fifth trip to Halls Creek and Kimberley communities to provide almost a month of dental care and dental health education. Jan and I travelled from Perth to top end of the Kimberley by helicopter from Sunday the 1st August to Wednesday the 4th. Fifteen hours of flying over some of the greatest places on earth.

For the first time, we visited communities outside of the East Kimberley to provide dental care. At the invitation of the Kalumburu and Gibb River communities, we were able to provide a full day and a half at Kalumburu and then a busy half day, (6 hours) at Gibb River Community. At Kalumburu, we used Dental Health Services equipment and materials, relocated from the school to the Kalumburu Health Clinic. The school had "boxed" everything dental, as were very keen to "clearout" this equipment as space was at a premium. The Remote Area Nurse Practitioner in charge, Lex Criddle, was more than happy to accommodate us and safely store everything for future visits. Sister Mary Scanlon from the Benedictine Mission, who had extended the invitation on behalf of the community, made us most welcome and was very appreciative of the dental care, including 20 extractions, we provided to the 28 community members seen and treated at the clinic.

Friday afternoon we flew south to Drysdale River Station to refuel the last 80 litres from our 200 drum and fly onto Gibb River Community. Here we were met by the most enthusiastic, Sister Mary Jane. Mary Jane is both a sister of the Church and the Community health sister. She had been liaising for almost 12 months with Dr Dennis Gregory and his National Dental Foundation Team. You will remember from the last E-Flyer, we had unusual weather conditions in May which prevented Dennis and his Team of five from travelling to Gibb River after all of their planning. Sadly for them, but great for us, as it was like Christmas with Jan and Mary Jane opening the numerous boxes of donated materials and equipment that had arrived months earlier. We worked until sunset getting the "new dental clinic" ready for business on Saturday morning. The donated dental chair was still sitting on the homestead veranda as the clinic was quite small and Mary Jane needed some guidance on where best to place it.

We opened the clinic at 8:30 am sharp on Saturday morning and what a surprise to see 8 men of all ages ranging from 17 to 45 years in their dark blue station gear, lined up ready for advice and care. Gibb River Community is a million acre working station owned and run by the community. All of these men had varying degrees of pain and only a couple had ever seen a dentist before. By three o'clock we had seen 21 members of the community and undertaken 7 extractions. It had been many years since a mobile dental service such as was introduced in the sixties by dental legends such as Dr Mick Powell, Dr Marian Brzezinski and Dr Pat Colgan were permanent fixtures in the area. Many young dentists including Dr Andrew Bartley cut their "teeth" in the Kimberley in the seventies and eighties but this was a rare event since the beginning of the nineties. We promised to return for a day with another dentist in two weeks and to continue to assist the community regularly in the future. We departed by 4pm Saturday afternoon, travelling South East, across the King Leopold Ranges the "centre" of the Kimberley, to Halls Creek to meet the volunteer team who had flown into Kununurra and driven down by the picturesque Savannah Way.

The team for week 1 included Dr Sue Anderson, Dr Richard Kozlowski and dental assistant Lana Sullivan. Monday was a busy start with the number 2 dental chair breaking down again (same as the May trip) on just our second patient. We just could not believe it. Oil spewed over the floor again so we had a "sloppy, climb / climb out recliner" for the next three weeks. I know, its still a lot better than what Dr Barry Thompson, Dr David Booth, Andrew Heap, Simon Shanahan and many others have to work with in Vietnam and India, but still it makes it all that much harder to provide a service. We had the additional use of an adjacent large specialist ENT room for the duration which was very handy for large families (often three to four kids at a time). On the Tuesday, John, Richard and Lana flew to Balgo Hills, an hour and ten minutes due south, (240kms), for a busy day of patients and on Thursday, Sue, Jan and John flew to Ringers Soak where we set up a dental room in the medical clinic. Both of these community visits were well attended and the people were very grateful to have resolution of their acute and chronic dental pain and infections. On Wednesday Jan and John flew to Kununurra to meet with the regional dental and medical hierarchy at the hospital. Dr Judy Darbyshire from DHS Perth and Dr Thrivalen Naidoo, Area Dental Officer and staff, convened a very productive meeting on how best to coordinate and integrate the dental services between the government and aboriginal medical services. Valuable information on the inefficiencies, communication, perceived and real flaws in the current system were discussed with several trial scenarios considered. Liaising with communities to coordinate care is a major but critical challenge if better outcomes are to be obtained.

Over the weekend we had Team Alpha swap over in Kununurra and the new team, Team Bravo, drove down to join us in Halls Creek. For week 2, Jan and I were joined by experienced KDT dentist Dr Daniel Cocker, dental assistant Leah Sieler (from Dr Peter Southall's practice) and two final year dental students, Naomi Kohan and Moses Lee. Daniel had been to Balgo in May and was keen to return with John and Leah for another very full day of patients. When the Team arrived in Balgo at 9:30am after the 70 minute flight, we were greeted by 33 patients waiting to be seen, all with their medical histories filled in. We pushed hard, undertaking 22 extractions and 4 fillings.

With last light approaching, one of the clinic staff drove John back to the airport to ready and start up the helicopter and fly "into town", landing on the side of the street outside the clinic. With rotors at 70% and just as the police vehicle came to a stop nearby, out ran Daniel and Leah with surgical back pack and other gear flopping from side to side, jumped into the helicopter, all happy waves, big smiles and off we flew. Boy that was a buzz.

Thankfully, Wednesday was a clinic free day and we set off northwards by helicopter and car to visit the Warmun and Crocodile Hole communities. We were made very welcome and treated to lunch by Megan and Eamonn of Gija Total Health. This was a great opportunity to see the plans for the future health clinic and the dental area allocated within. Our temporary "donger" at Warmun will be equipped and stocked as a dental clinic by early February 2011 when we next visit. The hoped that with good coordination, any member of our Team or dental profession will be able to assist this great community if they wish during their travels. Before heading home, we called into the



Disability House to treat a long time resident (MVA, 1979 when a teenager) who was suffering considerable dental pain. This saved the resident the 400 km, four hour, return trip to either Halls Creek or Kununurra in back of a van in his wheel chair. To be able to assist in this manner, is invaluable and makes us very proud of our Team. Please note, Daniel Jan and Leah did the work and Moses, Naomi and I, looked after the resident cat, after all you never know when a CT (cat) scan may be needed – see photo !! The helicopter passengers swapped to the car and vice versa so that everyone had the experience of an hour scenic flight over and around the majestic Bungle Bungles and back through the gorges and valleys of the high Ord country on the way back to Halls Creek.

On Thursday John, Jan and Naomi flew back across the Leopold Ranges to Gibb River and treated a further 22 people from the Gibb River and Mt Barnett Communities. We returned to Halls Creek weary, but very satisfied with our efforts and ready for Thai Buffet night at the hotel and an opportunity to debate who had the 'toughest' cases with the Halls Creek base team.

Friday evening, after a farewell dinner, Naomi and Leah caught the Greyhound bus to Broome for their homeward flights. Saturday was Election Day and we joined the locals at the Halls Creek District High School and then a relaxing coffee and read of the paper at Poinciana Café. Dental Hygienist Sabrina Weaver, having flown into Kununurra, travelled down by Greyhound and arrived at 9.30pm ready for week 3. Sunday was a great social day with a guided visit by Sciona Browne of the new hostel being built by the Better Life Project to provide accommodation for Indigenous Youth. Then we had an afternoon tea visit by Pip and Dick Smith who were travelling by campervan through the region. Afterwards we took a picnic out to Caroline Pool to watch the sunset. John flew the helicopter, taking Sabrina and the two medical doctors, Merv and Ann from Yuri Yungi Aboriginal Medical Services, via the gorges to the east and Old Halls Creek, the original town site during the 1888 gold rush.

With Team Charlie ready to go for the final week, John had to start the helicopter flight back to Perth in readiness for his monthly National Dental Board meeting in Melbourne. Without the helicopter the Team kept closer to base treating many adults and children including those who travelled in from Balgo, Billiluna and Warmun. On Wednesday we made a road trip to Yiyili community; screening and providing DHE to the school children and then treating patients in the Yiyili Medical Clinic. Yiyili has a magnificent art centre and Daniel and Jan bought beautiful pieces to take home which will forever remind us of this great community and its people.

Statistically, we had a very busy trip. I have placed corresponding numbers from the May trip in brackets. In total we saw 408 (229) patients in whom we undertook 224 (150) extractions, 116 (79) restorations, 20 (34) duraphat / fluoride applications, 31 (12) gross scaling, and again dozens of periapical and bitewing radiographs and many other minor services. We provided 3 partial acrylic dentures and 1 immediate partial. Thank you to, David Walters and David Owen, dental technicians in Perth, for donating their expertise and materials. Overall, a very significant increase although a bigger Team than in May 11 (8).

Team members were very fortunate that the Nguyuru Waaringarrem Music Festival was held on Saturday and although we had to head off for Kununurra we were able to attend for a couple of hours and enjoy the performances of the children from both the local government school and the small catholic school, called Red Hill.

Once again, our sincere thanks to Donna Hindmarsh, Director of Nursing, and her team at the Halls Creek Hospital for their continued support and assistance. Special thanks to Melanie for her clerical support and to Wendy and Liz for their interest in and commitment to ongoing dental health education in our absence. Very special thanks to Ann Mitchell who was instrumental in forging links for the KDT in Halls Creek and has now moved on to work on the development of a hospital in Vietnam. Thank you to Dr Martin Glick and Dr Judith Darbyshire of Dental Health Services for their acceptance and support of KDT and its passionate members. Professor Marc Tennant, Eva and staff at CRROH and for invaluable advice and facilitating the introduction of final year students to assist and work with the Team. In 2011 we hope to work closer with UWA and RFDS and increase in the Communities visited.

As recently as Thursday, many dentists would have received expressions of interest via our State Dental Association about the new initiative that Dr Don Rechichi, Jan and I have been working on with the Royal Flying Doctor Service, over the past six months. This has the potential to assist greatly with the provision of dental services to remote areas. Such a level of interest by so many important parties is as an excellent opportunity to bring all aspects of the Dental Team and logistics together to produce a truly beneficial and long lasting outcome for all. Transport, accommodation, facilities and the people are the four key ingredients. There is no doubt, our profession has the people.

Next year we are planning an early February recognisance trip to Kununurra and its outlying communities and Warmun to finalize the setup of the new clinic. The Kimberley Dental Team will be in the Kimberley from mid May and all of June in a concerted effort to dovetail care as so many patients are now returning for follow-up treatment, scaling, restorations and obtaining anterior partial dentures to replace teeth lost due to caries or physical injury.

Our first trips were definitely ones of acute symptom relief, but we are now seeing many patients becoming well aware of the general health and comfort benefits of being dentally fit. You create demand for a better oral health status through education and provision of sound and appropriate care. Surely, successful prevention comes from respectful advice, dental health education and early treatment.

Progress is very rewarding for all.

Jan & John

Mrs Jan & Dr John Owen AM
Directors and Joint Coordinators,
Kimberley Dental Team Inc
(h) 08 9277 3395: (w) 0407 998 215.
www.kimberleydentalteam.com