

# Training to help communities help themselves

**T**HE Sunnymede Trust was originally brought into existence by Dr Sharon Rankin in 1989, following volunteer work in Zambia, Africa. The trust offers more than just short term help, they strive to develop and maintain a sustainable healthcare future for those people living in areas with minimal access to oral care. The trust used to recruit volunteer dentists to offer their services to people living in disadvantaged rural areas of Africa. The most common treatment required was tooth extraction and pain relief.

## Sustainable solution

As the trust continued to offer this assistance to people in dire need of treatment, some of the dentists became increasingly frustrated at the numerical insignificance of this work. They could only treat a relatively small percentage of people and they knew that they were effectively serving to create a dependence on external support. After a lot of consideration and planning the trust decided to re-structure the focus of their work to create a long term, more sustainable solution to better meet the needs that they encountered. In 2007, the trust put their effort into developing an educational resource so that they could offer knowledge about Oral Health promotion, and treatment which could continue to

work, after the dentists and nurses left the area. As a result of this change in focus, the *Teeth Relief Oral Health Manual* was produced, giving easily understandable instructions on oral care and dental procedures with particular emphasis on safe practice in resource-poor situations and techniques that could be carried out by the reader.

## Tropical Nursing Diploma

In January 2009, students on The Tropical Nursing Diploma course at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) attended a dental lecture led by the Sunnymede Trust. This twice-yearly course is run by Claire Bertschinger, the nurse who inspired Live Aid in 1984 and includes a 'hands-on' dental training session, offering the nursing students a fascinating insight into how to approach and manage Oral Health in developing countries where access to dental care and resources are often limited.

The session, which offers comprehensive guidance on tooth charting, oral injections and tooth extractions began with a short introduction to the charity itself and the people involved. Students were able to use a range of dental tools and training equipment to practise procedures. Much of the consumable equipment was donated by ethical dental equipment suppliers Henry Schein Minerva, an organisation who is keen to promote safe practice and certainly understand the importance of oral hygiene.

Students on the course were given copies of the *Teeth Relief Oral Health Manual*, specifically designed as an educational and training resource for people with basic medical knowledge, who want to learn more about oral health and pain relief for people in disadvantaged communities. The manual was written by Sharon Rankin, (practising dentist and chair of the Sunnymede Trust) and creative writer Marian Lennon. It offers a unique blend of specialist

**THE PROBE** looks at a charitable trust who developed a sustainable resource for disadvantaged communities worldwide to help themselves to better oral care, and the practical use of this resource in the Tropical Nursing Diploma...

dental knowledge in an easily understood form. There are no presumptions other than basic medical training and no unrealistic expectations of hi-tech resources so the reader is encouraged to work with what they have, to share the best achievable, safe practice. It is written in 'plain English' with lots of images and a clear layout so that students can read up on oral anatomy, health promotion and cross infection control as well as gain advice on how to set up and manage an oral health clinic, examine the mouth & diagnose common problems, perform injections in the mouth and carry out cleaning and simple extractions.

## Well received session

The nursing students were encouraged to review pages of the Oral Health Manual whilst carrying out practical tasks to ensure that they fully understood the instructions being given. The session was very well received. The class of around 50 people were all happy to get 'stuck in' with the practical elements of the session, and when asked if they intend to work in developing countries, the vast majority of the class confirmed that they had already begun to prepare for this. The session also included a shocking video of a well intentioned but uninformed street dentist performing an extraction on a patient in Asia. The dentist did very well with limited resources in poor conditions and anaesthetic was safely applied but only to one side of the tooth (lower molar) so the patient suffered considerable shock and pain when the tooth was removed. This was avoidable and the nurses could quickly appreciate that simply by increasing their own knowledge and passing this on to others, they might begin to make a real difference.



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Ten dentists volunteered to help run the course, moving around the room offering assistance and guidance during practical exercises and helping to explain the theory elements of the course.

One of the nurses, who had spent time in Cambodia in the past, described the session as "an exciting and extensive outlook on some of dentistry's most important procedures", whilst another said "the practical activity was great, and the manual really helped me to understand why I was taking the precautions that I was". Both students were due to take their final exam on the Diploma course the following week, with one travelling to Liberia the day after to begin her volunteer work and both were eager to express what a great form of revision for the exam the course was and how helpful the *Oral Health Manual* would prove to be, especially in the area of cross infection control.

## Henry Schein Minerva

Henry Schein Minerva is proud to be a provider to a course that offers as many benefits as The Tropical Nursing Diploma, and to contribute to the work of Teeth

Relief and support the training of health workers by encouraging the spread of good and safe practice towards a significant improvement in world oral health.

## Find out more

If you'd like to know more about the *Oral Health Manual*, e-mail the Sunnymede Trust via [info@teethrelief.org.uk](mailto:info@teethrelief.org.uk). As a registered charity, they do not receive any income and would especially appreciate offers of dental training equipment (eg teeth models or skulls) and also to hear from individuals or groups who could sponsor copies of the manual for communities who cannot afford to pay. A donation of £20 will enable a community to look after their own Oral Health and has the potential to educate entire regions about good, safe practice. For donations and free download of the manual visit: [www.teethrelief.org.uk](http://www.teethrelief.org.uk).



Practising examinations