

Filling the Gap

– dentists making a world of difference

IN THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AROUND CAIRNS AND THE ATHERTON TABLELANDS OF FAR NORTH

QUEENSLAND THERE IS A DENTAL BLACKHOLE. THE WAITING LIST FOR BASIC CARE IS MORE THAN ONE YEAR AND

IS CAUSING PEOPLE WITH MINOR PROBLEMS TO DEVELOP ACUTE OR CHRONIC CONDITIONS. AND IT'S NOT FROM

A LACK OF FACILITIES – THE LOCAL INDIGENOUS HEALTH SERVICE, WUCHOPPEREN, HAS TWO FULLY EQUIPPED

DENTAL ROOMS AT ITS CAIRNS CLINIC AND A MOBILE DENTAL VAN READY TO TRAVEL TO ATHERTON AND OUTLYING

COMMUNITIES.



Drs Galoustian and Swann at the Wuchopperen Dental program rooms.

What the service does lack are dentists. Apart from one local dentist who sees patients at Wuchopperen one day a week, and the occasional backpacker, the rooms are empty and the queues continue to grow.

The *Filling the Gap*, Indigenous Dental Program, however, is turning this around. Since the beginning of the year volunteer dentists have given their time to work at Wuchopperen in Cairns for one to two weeks at a time. Dentists volunteer their time, but flights, accommodation as well as registration with the Queensland Dental Board are paid for.

Dr Flora Galoustian from Sydney, the first dentist to *Fill the Gap* in January this year, found her time at Wuchopperen a completely rewarding experience.

"I'm so glad I did it. I would like to go again and make it a yearly thing. Even though each day was a really full day's work – I worked through my lunch hour as well to see the maximum number of patients – it was very refreshing", remarked Dr Galoustian.

Melbourne dentist, Dr Swann Lam, who also spent a week in Cairns in January, said "I have wanted to do some volunteer work in dentistry for some time, and there are programs in Nepal and Vietnam and Cambodia – but it's for a longer period of time – and it's hard to take time off from my practice.

"I found it was quite easy to take a week off to do this and I really enjoyed the interaction with the patients, and the challenges of trying to motivate them to help prevent dental problems. I'm planning to go back in October." Dr Lam concluded.

Between Dr Galoustian and Dr Lam 114 patients were treated.

The *Filling the Gap* program is flexible, so it is possible to combine the trip with some time-off in the area afterwards. If you would like to assist the *Filling the Gap* program, there are two ways:

1. Volunteer your time and services: to find out more about volunteering call Gael Kennedy on 0403 131 410 or Uri Windt on 0418 208 755, or email Uri at: uri.windt@tarwin.net
2. Buy or sell second hand dental equipment or materials on www.djs.com.au

Dentist Job Search (DJS) recently launched 'Dental Classifieds'. A place online where dental practices can go to list second-hand equipment or materials. The price per listing is AUD\$20 and DJS has agreed to donate all proceeds to the *Filling the Gap* Dentist Volunteer program and the Indigenous Community Volunteers (I.C.V) dental fund. Visit www.djs.com.au to post your ad or view current classified ads – just click on the Classifieds button. ♦



More information about the Wuchopperen Indigenous Health Service can be found online at: www.wuchopperen.com