Dentaid Despatch 49

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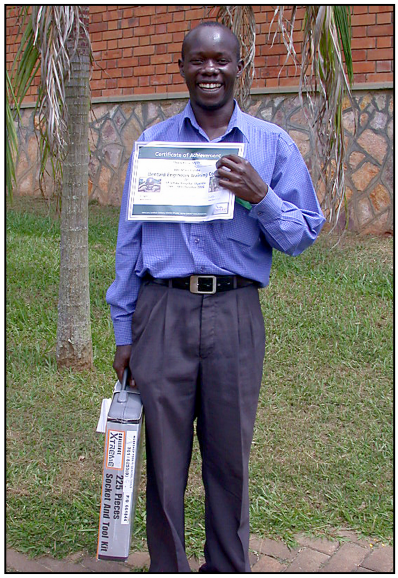
Uganda's first dental engineer training course hailed success by all!
When a dentist's equipment breaks down in the UK, it normally takes little more than a phone call and a few hour's frustrating wait before an engineer arrives, the surgery is hopefully fixed and ready to see patients again. In the developing world, things rarely run so smoothly. In countries where there may only be fifty dentists in the whole country, the chance of there being even one specialist dental engineer is virtually non-existent. As a result, equipment in vital regional treatment centres often stands un-repaired for weeks, months or indefinitely.

Oral health charity Dentaid has been looking to address this problem and for a number of years has given training to individual engineers from partner projects overseas. However, Dentaid's engineers had a vision for a larger and more strategic training programme, dedicated to equipping general hospital technicians with the necessary skills to maintain, service and repair dental equipment.

And in October 2006 this vision became a reality. Fourteen hospital technicians and engineers from NGO and government hospitals in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi gathered at the Mildmay Hospital and Training Centre near Kampala, Uganda to take part in Dentaid's inaugural residential dental engineer training course. Believed to be the first of its kind planned specifically for the developing world, Dentaid's engineers had designed the ten-day course to be, above all, practical and hands-on. Thus, not only to equip the students with necessary technical knowledge but also to give them the practical skills and confidence needed to investigate and diagnose potential problems with dental equipment.

Richard Grapes, Dentaid's Head of Engineering and course leader reports:- "The local engineers were conscientious, hard working and always had a smile on their faces. Most said that this was the first hands-on training that they had ever received, which in terms of equipment maintenance was more than a little surprising."

On completion of the course all students were awarded a certificate and a comprehensive tool kit at a formal presentation ceremony. Her Majesty's Consul, from the British High Commission in Uganda, was present at the ceremony to congratulate the successful candidates and formally to open the dental surgery installed at Mildmay by the Dentaid team and used during the training.



David Effamy, Dentaid's second engineer delivering the course added:- "The reactions of the engineers at the prize giving was the most satisfying part of our time at Mildmay. They were so grateful for the time and effort we had invested in them. Sometimes, hospital engineers and their vital role don't seem to get the support and recognition they should, and so we were delighted to help in this way. One engineer told me that he was expected to provide his own tools in his job and only had a few random spanners, which he kept in a carrier bag. He said he would have had to save up for ten years to afford a toolbox like the one he had just received. I think that everybody learned a lot, including us, and I am looking forward to doing it again …Soon!"

Luke Wordley, Dentaid's Chief Executive, added:- "The course was a great success and a huge tribute must be paid to Dentaid's engineers who worked virtually day and night for weeks in its preparation. This type of initiative is a major step forward in improving the sustainability of dental services in much-needed regional treatment centres in Africa. As a result of this course, we believe Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi now have their own trained and equipped dental engineers for the very first time, and we hope to hold similar courses in other regions in the future."

A significant by-product of the course was that two new clinics have also been established at charitable hospitals, serving HIV patients at Mildmay Hospital and disadvantaged communities surrounding nearby Bunawona Health Centre.