

Snowboarding Down Everest

What: Sponsored 'Snowboard Down Everest' – OK not the actual mountain, but the equivalent height of 8850m

When: 22nd/23rd August 2008

Where: SNO!zone at Xscape Milton Keynes

Who: Neil Harris

Why: To raise awareness and money for the charities "Mercy Ships" and "Dentaid"

Dentist in 'Everest' Challenge (10 hours on a button lift!)

Friday 22nd August, 5½ miles up, -40 °C, next to no oxygen, and 118 mile an hour winds blowing the snow off the highest mountain in the world,.....fortunately Neil Harris was tucked up inside at the Milton Keynes SNO!zone – but its real snow still made it a bit chilly!



Dressed in surgical scrubs, Neil, a dentist from Oxford House Dental Practice in Milton Keynes, was starting the first of his 295 runs down the slope at the SNO!zone at Xscape which would make up the equivalent height of Everest (8850m).

And why - a question Neil asked himself numerous times during his 295 runs? In order to raise money and awareness for two charities that he is closely linked with.

The international charity Mercy Ships (www.mercyships.org.uk) provides much needed medical aid to countries in Africa, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, two of the poorest countries in the world. Oral health charity Dentaid (www.dentaid.org) refurbishes donated UK dental equipment to provide dental surgeries to needy communities worldwide.



"I have had the privilege of serving with Mercy Ships as a dentist for a couple of weeks each year for the last five years and it is an amazing charity. As it says on their logo, they bring 'Hope and Healing' to the poor and they don't come much poorer than some of the countries I have been out to with Mercy Ships.

"One of the most amazing things is that all the crew on the ship are volunteers; in fact they even have to raise their own money for crew fees and travel. So you can imagine how much of the money donated to this charity goes directly to the work. I could bombard you with facts and figures about what they achieve, but just seeing the smile on a mother's face, when her baby has had a life changing cleft lip repaired by the surgeons in one of the operating theatres on the ship, says it all. So I am looking forward to going back out to Liberia in October to help again in the dental clinic the ship has set up for the local population. Did I mention there are only 3 licensed dentists in Liberia – for a population of over 3 million?!"

"I've also had links with Dentaaid for a number of years, ranging from donating equipment from our practice to be refurbished for needy projects, to taking part in fundraising events. In fact Oxford House Dental Practice has won a number of prizes in their 'Dress Up 4 Dentaaid Day. Fundraising events like these enable Dentaaid to carry out their vital work improving the world's oral health. As well as supplying equipment and instruments Dentaaid also train indigenous workers so communities are benefited by their work long term. Dentaaid also educate local people about the importance of good oral health and are involved in schools programmes in Uganda and Cameroon where children are educated, screened and treated if necessary.

"In my time I have treated patients dressed as Superman and Scooby Doo! It's great to think that some of the equipment I use out in Liberia is only there as a result of the work of Dentaaid back in this country.

Saturday 23rd August and 295 runs later, Neil was going up the lift once more! "I thought I had better do an extra run in case they change the height of Everest again!"

So how did it go? "Pretty good. Yes my legs were getting tired, but I think that was down to the 10 hours on the button lift going up, as opposed to the coming down on my board! But the best bit is that over £3,000 has been raised for the charities. I'd really like to thank everyone who supported me during the event – donating money, waving at me, letting me push in in the lift queue, and buying me coffee!

In addition to his dental work, Neil is also a part-time snowboard instructor at SNO!zone where he has been training for the event.