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Mission trip to Rwanda will focus on education

By Stacie Crozier, ADA News staff

Peoria, Ariz.—In an effort to fill the gap that still remains in Rwanda because of the 1994 genocide, a charitable dental organization is planning a mission trip that will focus on educating children, teachers, nurses and community health workers about oral health care practices, good nutrition and tooth decay prevention.



Training health workers: A dental hygienist volunteer for Rural Rwanda Dental teaches local health workers basic periodontal care skills at Kigali Health Institute, the only dental training facility in Rwanda.

Rural Rwanda Dental volunteers in February 2012 will visit village schools to teach oral health prevention techniques; apply sealants and fluoride varnish; and perform atraumatic restorative treatments as needed.

“The health care infrastructure in Rwanda was decimated by the genocide,” said Dr. Richard Reckmeyer, RRD executive director. “The government has responded by training thousands of community health workers and building hundreds of community health centers, but there isn’t a large focus on oral health right now.”

RRD, founded in 2009, made a mission trip to Rwanda in 2010, and volunteers found themselves mostly performing and teaching how to perform extractions, he added. “So we wanted to develop a sustainable education program that

would focus on teaching children and health care workers the importance of prevention and oral health care. The key words in our program are ‘sustainable’ and ‘education.’ We also wanted to make sure the program was culturally appropriate and affordable.”

When Dr. Reckmeyer applied for a grant to support the mission, his organization’s program caught the attention of Henry Schein Cares, the global social responsibility program of Henry Schein Inc. RRD was selected last month as a recipient in the HSC Global Production Donation Program, and will receive thousands of dollars’ worth of health care supplies to use in Rwanda.

“The generous donation will support our community outreach where we place sealants and ARTs; apply fluoride varnish; distribute toothbrushes; and train community health workers, Rwandan dental therapists, nurses and teachers to educate children and families in rural Rwanda about oral health and nutrition,” said Dr. Reckmeyer.

Dr. Reckmeyer said Rural Rwanda Dental is also seeking dental professional volunteers for upcoming trips, tax-deductible donations of prevention-related supplies or money to help sustain the program.

“The more we can empower Rwandans to help themselves, the better off they will be,” he said.

For more information about Rural Rwanda Dental, visit the website: <http://rrdental.org>.

Visit the ADA’s International Volunteer Web page, <http://internationalvolunteer.ada.org>, to search for volunteer opportunities by organization, country/region, program type and more, or contact the ADA Division of Global Affairs for more information 1-312-440-2726.



Teaching kids: Dr. Richard Reckmeyer teaches basic oral health skills to children at a rural Rwandan school. The education session shows them how to use the ridges of their fingers to brush if they don't have a toothbrush.