



A MISSIONS STORY: DENTISTS IN THE DOMINICAN

By Saskia Vaughan, DDS, MAGD, LLSR

It all started with using rocking chairs as dental chairs for patients. Since then, Dr. Saskia Vaughan's, MAGD, experience with helping the underserved in developing nations has hit 16 years. Her impact alone has been in treating hundreds, if not thousands, of patients. And the organization she serves with – Medical Ministries International – has expanded through the years to include more services and even warehouses of equipment. Dr. Vaughan's hope is that dentists reading this will become involved in its outreach, too.



Through Medical Ministry International, MMI (mmi.org), Dr. Vaughan and teams travel from village to village in the Dominican Republic, setting up shop in venues such as schools and churches, with what supplies they have gathered or been given. The patients are asked to pay a small fee for their dental visit, so that they are more vested in the process; "It makes it more valuable to them," said Dr. Vaughan. Most patients take off a full day of work to ensure they get seen.

Dr. Vaughan has been humbled by how appreciative the patients are. "When you are there, it's just a really sweet week getting to do what we enjoy most – treating patients, and not dealing with exorbitant paperwork and insurance. I tell other potential volunteers that if you ever get

stressed out, just take a week away and this will change your perspective. Some of these individuals actually live on dirt floors. Yet, when you are able to fix their smile it's a huge impact – for all involved - because they are so happy despite what their circumstances might be, and tend to smile a lot!"

Through the basic dental care MMI provides, Dr. Vaughan has witnessed many everyday miracles as well as significant indirect impacts. After all, she sees about 20 patients a day, one week each year.

A mother thought her son had a facial skin problem she kept trying to treat with different skin creams – to his detriment – but he ended up just needing a badly infected tooth extracted. Other parents urged the dentists to pull their adolescent daughter's front tooth because they were convinced that was better than it being chipped. However, MMI dentists provided a cosmetically pleasing outcome, getting to keep the tooth -- with the addition of a filling. And the list goes on. Further, MMI focuses on preventative messaging. "The parents seem to really absorb all of that information to take back home and put into practice," she said.

Because of the impact MMI was having on the people of the Santo Domingo region, a local sponsored a Dominican man to go to dental school (their tuition is much more affordable than in the U.S.) because it would keep paying dividends for the community. That student is now a dentist and has worked with MMI every month for years now.

Follow-up is an important part of MMI's ministry, whether that be in the dental – or Christian faith – ministry. The team imparts the message of Christian salvation to receptive patients.

Dr. Vaughan says she hopes the impactful stories she tells will encourage others to sign up for a trip, maybe even one she'll be on. MMI is always looking for new volunteers, and Dr. Vaughan echoes she would love to have new faces in October. Her group's next trip is Oct. 12-21, 2018. Dentists, assistants, hygienists and spouses (general help) are all welcome. "We would especially love to have AGD dentists," she says. "Further, if you're working on your LLSR it gives you MANY service hours!" Some people take a few days on either side of the trip to relax at a resort, as well.

From the humble beginnings Dr. Vaughan experienced in her first trip (to Mexico, through another group), she now experiences working through an organization with a dental team, medical team and surgical team – sometimes her team is even involved with general surgeries such as hernias. This is another part of the mission that helps her to expand her world. In fact, Dr. Vaughan has been the Dental/ Medical Director since 2005. The volunteers and dentists also enjoy the fellowship they share in the evenings.

MMI, based in Canada, hosts North American dentists and doctors who carry out its mission in the 19 countries MMI serves. It refers to itself as an opportunity to serve Jesus Christ by providing spiritual and compassionate health care in this world of need.

Through its over 1,000 volunteers and loyal donors, it "seeks to establish medical platforms for service and education that build medical capacity for those that need it most, and endeavors to establish long term programs and facilities that address these needs."

To get involved on the next dental mission trip, please contact Dr. Vaughan at vaugdds@gmail.com.

