

JUST ANOTHER DENTIST

"Now, you probably don't know me from a bar of soap so I am about to rectify that!

I am a dentist... Working as a dental nurse while I was still at school, I always aspired to be a dentist. Having worked in both metropolitan and regional Victoria, I now run my practice in Prahran East, Melbourne. I am sure all the dentist who read my article can relate to feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the reality of dentistry. However, I still love it and that's why I am also a chairperson for the National Dental Foundation in Victoria.

You see, just over two years ago a woman I interviewed for a dental receptionist position at my practice told me about the National Dental Foundation (NDF) a registered charity. So I googled it. A simple but informative website popped up. I browsed through it quickly. Nothing flash.... It didn't leave me compelled to ring up and volunteer. I had enough things to worry about running my practice, let alone do charity dentistry. I went home that night wondering though. A dental charity that claims to be national, and I've never heard of it...? I returned to my practice the following morning. My week wasn't particularly easy with it's usual worries involved in running a young practice: recruiting staff, minimising cancellations, attracting patients, broken equipment and making ends meet. At the end of the week, as usual, I was exhausted. I wondered about my own personal satisfaction as a dentist. It seemed that running a dental practice was 10% dentistry and 90% nonsense. As an enthusiastic dentist, I started to feel somewhat disenchanted. After all I was a dentist.

A few weeks later, NDF popped back in my mind. I thought I'd give it a crack. A day was arranged. All I had to do was to let them know what time we'd like to start and finish, and how long I'd like my appointments to be. NDF took care of everything else. I ran it past my staff, not knowing if they would bother and was pleased and proud that they were keen to participate. A week prior to the day, Henry Schein, Dentsply and Colgate generously donated some materials for the day and I got to try some new stuff. The day turned out to be surprisingly easy and ran smoothly like a well oiled machine. The word got out and there was media on my door step, wanting to publish an article in the Leader newspaper as we were one of the first dental practices in Victoria to participate. In the weeks following, our regular patients complemented us on what we were doing. It reminded me of my days working in country Victoria

and how poor some people's oral health is, especially when they can't afford care. And for my nurses, who've never worked anywhere but my practice in Prahran, it was clearly a shock. They didn't realise that some live in pain without the choice or hope of having it relieved.

I've never come across such grateful patients. Despite their sad state, and carrying burdens I would never be able to relieve, we were still able to bring genuine smiles to their faces. Mother Teresa, I am not, nor will I preach sainthood, but taking one day a year and dedicating it to the few homeless kids left me in an elated mood and with lasting memories. The reward was not financial but my selfish needs were satisfied. I was proudly a dentist. Two years later, my staff and I are looking forward to our third Dental Rescue Day in August this year.

Now as an NDF state chairperson for Victoria, I am inspired to welcome you to join the echelons of many dentists who are already enjoying the rewards of helping the needy.

If you wish to be a provider of dental services and run a Dental Rescue Days at you practice, please contact us on: 03 98214990 and ask for Sally Williams.

Helen Voronina
(NDF chairperson for Victoria)"
www.nationaldentalfoundation.org.au