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A patient receives free dentures from Dental Volunteers for Israel. (Photo by: Courtesy)

Dental Volunteers for Israel provides free dentures to elderly in need

By SARAH LEVI
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The Jerusalem based free dental clinic kicks off its second year of providing free dentures to those in need.

Dental Volunteers for Israel, or DVI, is the Jerusalem-based free dental clinic that provides dental care for Israel's most impoverished citizens since 1980.

The clinic provides dental care to the most needy of citizens regardless of race or background. In addition, they also treat women in battered women's shelters, their children as well as at-risk youth. Last year alone, the clinic provided free dental care to 2,784 at risk youth.

Michelle Levine, the director of development and international relations who has been involved in DVI activities for the past nine years, told The Jerusalem Post: "Providing free dental care helps patients to escape the cycle of poverty; when they learn to care for their oral health, they begin to care about their overall nutrition and caring for themselves."

Working with dental-care professionals who volunteer at the clinic from all over the world, some 4,500 dentists have volunteered their time and services to the DVI clinic over the course of 37 years.

Since 2016, DVI has branched out and created the Free Denture Program, which to date has successfully provided 105 patients with new dentures. Targeted at Israel's elderly population, mainly Holocaust survivors, their follow-up year of providing free dentures begins in September and aims at providing some 100 more elderly patients not only a new set of dentures but a new lease on life.

“We had no idea what the impact would be to provide free dentures,” Levine said, adding: “Patients coming in with two or three teeth in their mouth, and they’ve been like this for 20 to 30 years.”

She said many of these patients have chosen to not leave their home nor communicate with their friends and family. As a result of their isolation, they suffer symptoms of depression and even dementia. After the treatment, “the impact is so profound and so powerful, now they go out every single day, none of these patients are staying at home, they can finally live with dignity. Now they are sharing stories from their past with their children and their grandchildren.”

Following the treatment, children and grandchildren come to the clinic “in tears thanking us for bringing their grandmother or grandfather back to them, saying ‘He was gone for 20 years and you returned him to us,’” Levine said.

Because this is a program that is not funded nor subsidized by the government, the clinic is totally reliant on the volunteer work provided by the dentists and donations from mainly the Abraham and Sonia Rochlin Foundation and Operation Blessing – an American Evangelical Christian foundation connected to the Christian Broadcasting Network. “We are so grateful they care about our Holocaust survivors,” Levine said.

Dr. Sarit is the dentist responsible for providing all of the patients with their new dentures. An established prosthodontist, she believes she is part of a “very special project.”

“I have treated 60 to 70 Holocaust survivors, and we do it for free with the best lab equipment and materials,” Palmon said.

“Following the treatment, the patient’s overall health improves, because they can now chew fruits and vegetables.

The transformation always amazes me because it changes the shape of their faces. And it [the dentures] really helps them to connect with their friends and family because they are no longer ashamed to leave the house.”

Despite the projected 100 patients to receive free dentures, according to Levine, there is a waiting list of a few dozen patients still in need.



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