

The Eagle

College Station dentist volunteers in Jerusalem to care for children

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Dr. John Case, a College Station pediatric dentist, served with Dental Volunteers for Israel, or DVI, in their Trudi Birger Clinic in Jerusalem where children receive free comprehensive care.
Photo special to The Eagle

Dr. John Case took his medical talents about 7,000 miles from College Station, where he normally provides pediatric dental care, to Jerusalem for one week of teeth-fixing -- and one of sightseeing -- in May.

"Having read the Bible, it's very interesting to go to Israel," said Case, who is a Christian.

Case, a dentist at the College Station office of Brazos Valley Pediatric Dentistry, spent a week in Israel in May providing dental care for children whose families otherwise could not afford to pay.

Case served with Dental Volunteers for Israel, or DVI, in their Trudi Birger Clinic in Jerusalem. Children receive free, comprehensive care from volunteer dentists from all over the world -- from the United States to Guam, Australia to South Korea, said Dr. Scott Dubowsky, a New Jersey-based dentist and president of American Friends of DVI.

"We fill a huge void," Dubowsky said, adding that DVI is "completely nonsectarian. We treat all children, regardless of race or religion. It doesn't matter."

Dubowsky said the clinics generally see children between 12 and 18 years old.

"The amount of dental disease in some of these children, in some of the cavities they have, is mind-boggling," he said.

Israel has a universal health care system, but dental care for adults is not included in that coverage. Dental coverage was recently expanded for those up to age 12, leaving teens and adults from lower socioeconomic statuses with few cheap options when seeking dental health care. Dubowsky said citizens can seek dental care through Kupot Cholim -- basically an Israeli HMO -- but there are some access and affordability issues. Dental care from DVI's clinic is free.

Volunteer DVI dentists provide children and their families with comprehensive care, educating them on proper nutrition and how to brush and floss their teeth. Dubowsky said the comprehensive care attracts dentists such as Case -- it's "not just the adventure of going to

Israel," Dubowsky said of DVI's allure -- because filling cavities only goes so far; educating families makes them less likely to need to come back later.

"Most dentists appreciate the fact that these children are being given comprehensive dental care that they otherwise would never have gotten," Dubowsky said.

Dentists who volunteer with DVI pay their for their own airfare and meals, but lodging is provided by the program; Dubowsky said DVI manages apartments that dentists live in during their stints.

"It's their base. They can explore Israel and Jerusalem in their spare time," he said.

Case volunteered for a week this past May, but he stayed in Israel for an extra week to do some exploring of his own. He also volunteered with DVI two years ago for two weeks; he said he looks forward to going back for a third time.

"Kids are kids, people are people, families are families. Most everybody just wants good for their kids," Case said of the lesson he has learned through his volunteering in Israel. "Although cultures and cuisine and different things like that can be different, people are people."