
Dental Volunteers for Israel: care without barriers

FEATURED PRODUCTS PROMOTIONAL FEATURES

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*Dr Satinder Matharu, Specialist in Endodontics at **EndoCare** in London and British Trustee for Dental Volunteers in Israel shares information about the charity and how it's going above and beyond to help those in need – regardless of their background...*

The story behind Dental Volunteers in Israel is nothing short of inspiring. In 1947, Holocaust survivor Trudi Birger arrived in Israel and vowed to help those in need – especially immigrants and other individuals who may not have the means to access necessary healthcare. At the beginning she worked with underprivileged children and quickly realised that this vulnerable segment of society was often without the means to get dental care.

Fast forward to 1980 and Trudi set up Dental Volunteers for Israel (DVI). DVI is a non-profit organisation that provides comprehensive dental care to impoverished children, Holocaust survivors, and the elderly, regardless of race or religion, all without charge. She found premises in Jerusalem and a dental clinic was set up with help from friends and contributions from dental supply companies.



As the charity is open to all, this means that we treat Israeli Arabs and Palestinians, Jews and African refugees. Following the recent events in Ukraine, we've also started treating Ukrainian refugees who have come to Israel to avoid the conflict in their home country.

I became involved with DVI following a recommendation from a colleague, Dr Linda Schaller, who has been a volunteer at the clinic for many years and persuaded me to join her in volunteering and provide endodontics to those in urgent need of treatment.

Not knowing quite what to expect, I realised from the outset that the DVI clinic provides outstanding essential dental treatment to children and young adults, all of whom are immensely appreciative of the care that the volunteers provide. I am a small part of the

solution in helping socially deprived young adults from all backgrounds by dealing with their dental pain and helping people to love their smile again.

Jerusalem is a diverse melting pot of religions, ethnicities and people from different walks of life, but there is poverty here too; and people from all backgrounds need support. Improving the dental health of these individuals goes a tremendous way in increasing their self-confidence, academic success and ability to be more valued in the wider community.

DVI's patients are referred by social workers from municipal welfare services as well as many other organisations such as domestic violence shelters, girls' orphanages, youth-at-risk programmes and organisations that support children that have been removed from their familial home.



Amazingly, the clinic remained open throughout the pandemic and as overseas volunteers were not able to visit, patient care was continued by local dentists and resident students from Hadassah School of Dental Medicine, Tel Aviv School of Dental Medicine, The Galilee Medical Centre and Tel HaShomer/Sheba Medical Centre. Executive Director Dr Roy Petel, a Professor of Paediatric Dentistry, recruited the help of the latter three dental schools which began sending their residents to work in the clinic.

In 2019 DVI had 140 volunteers from 19 different countries allowing dentists from around the world to share best practices, and during 2020 it still had 59 volunteer dentists! These

included specialist endodontists, paedodontists and prosthodontists along with general dental practitioners.

Over the past 5-10 years DVI has become a pathway for Palestinian and Arab Israeli dentists, who often hail from low-income and under-served communities, to access further dental skills through its Arab Advancement Program. Volunteering at DVI for a few years is also a way to gain acceptance onto specialisation programmes and employment. Due to the generosity of previous donors, from 2018 to 2020 DVI trained 5 Palestinian and Arab dentists annually and helped advance their careers. In March 2020, due to the pandemic, foreign dentists could not enter Israel and the training programme tripled in size.

Adding another string to its bow, the clinic has been running a Free Denture Project for the elderly in Jerusalem. London's Sobell Foundation has supported this project for years and The Kennedy Leigh Charitable Trust was one of the project's first supporters. Originally launched as a pilot scheme, this has now become permanent with the creation of an in-house Denture Lab that opened in June 2022.

The Clinic continues to work cost-efficiently as there is no state funding and continues to treat increasing patient numbers and provide training, like most charitable organisations. This on-going support includes financial aid, materials and equipment through volunteers as well as donations. Luckily, many supporters have stepped in to help – for example, during the pandemic when the increased cost of PPE was not budgeted for, Alpha Omega London kindly funded the entire cost in 2020. The dental community as well as society at large can enable the clinic to continue with its vital work free of charge for the those most in need with such continued generosity.

Ultimately, working at the clinic is not only spiritually rewarding but also great fun. I've made good friends with fellow professionals, including the dental nurses, administrative staff and colleagues from around the world. For me, the greatest pleasure is that I get to see the immense gratitude of patients following treatment at the clinic and the appreciation they show of the time and effort that volunteers provide. Helping people is its own reward, and DVI goes to incredible lengths to ensure that everyone receives the care they need!



You can find out more about the work of the DVI and get involved by visiting the DVI website here: <https://dental-dvi.org.il/>

You can also make a donation here: <https://system.smartgiving.org.uk/charities/12454>

For further information please email satinder@endocare.co.uk