

UBC Dentistry Team Serves Penelakut First Nation

BY TERRY WINTONYK
WITH FILES FROM DUSTIN GEORGE AND JENN PARSONS



This past July, dental and dental hygiene students, alumni and faculty of UBC Dentistry, along with community dentists and other volunteers, donated their time and professional skills to the people of Penelakut First Nation. The community volunteer clinic took place over a weekend on Kuper Island, a small, 8.66-square-kilometre island located east of Chemainus, BC, a town on Vancouver Island.

The clinic provided an ideal opportunity for dental and dental hygiene students to have an educational experience above and beyond the traditional classroom. This project also reflects the UBC Faculty of Dentistry's mandate to improve the oral health of people in need, promote health education and social betterment, and enhance students' awareness and role as global citizens through community service.

The Kuper Island dental clinic was organized by UBC alumnus and Rotary Club member Doug Nielsen DMD 1972, his wife Susan and other volunteers, with support from the Dental Mission Project. This organization, which Nielsen was instrumental in forming, provides portable supplies and equipment to dental professionals who want to organize a dental mission to communities, anywhere in the world, in need of oral health care.

Upon arriving at Chemainus, the clinic team was introduced to retired police officer Bob Blacker, district governor for the Rotary Club. Blacker and the Rotary Club work closely with Government House and Lt-Gov. Steven L. Point OBC on literary projects in remote and underserved BC communities. It was Blacker and fellow Rotarian Doug Nielsen who originally saw the potential of providing dental services on

Kuper Island at the same time as the Rotary Club was to build a library in the community.

Then third-year dental student Dustin George was involved with the project from the beginning. "I understood this project would be a unique opportunity to exercise my newly acquired clinical skills—but it proved to be more than that. I discovered an ability to be flexible and more culturally sensitive as I adopted an open mind and a go-with-the-flow attitude. It was a strikingly different setting from what I was used to at the UBC dental clinic or other community volunteer dental clinics in the Vancouver area."

Dustin remembers day one: "We arrived at the school gymnasium, where we would assemble our temporary dental clinic using three portable dental chairs and other equipment. Karen Milanese, the school principal, had been instrumental in organizing patients and encouraging community members to attend the clinic. People began to arrive, slowly at first, in family groups—children, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. I learned that members of this community operate as family units; the team adopted a flexible treatment schedule in order to accommodate the needs of the whole family. By day three," Dustin continues, "we had provided dental services for 68 people on the island—a true team effort!"

Regarding his own future as a health care provider, Dustin says, "My Kuper Island experience taught me the importance of helping all communities find better health. It doesn't matter if the community is around the world or in our own backyard—I can make a difference."

Kuper Island Volunteer Community Clinic

Dental services were provided by:

- Dr. Bill Brymer, Clinical Assistant Professor, UBC Dentistry
- Cameron Garrett DMD 2012 (candidate)
- Dustin George DMD 2011 (candidate)
- Kathryn Hunter DMD 2012 (candidate)
- Trish Morales BSc (Dental Hygiene) 2012 (candidate)
- Doug Nielsen DMD 1972
- Margaret Sieber Dip DH 1970
- Dr. Ken Stones
- Gary Sutton DMD 1972
- Ehsan Taheri DMD 2011 (candidate)
- Jhustine Tolentino BSc (Dental Hygiene) 2012 (candidate)
- Hanah Tsao DMD 2011 (candidate)
- April Wang DMD 2011 (candidate)

Other volunteer support was provided by:

- Bob Blacker
- Joanne Dawson CDA
- Susan Nielsen
- Jenn Parsons, Manager of Alumni & Community Affairs, UBC Dentistry
- Rotary Club of Chemainus
- Rotary Club of Steveston
- Suzanne Sutton

To find out more about how to include dental and dental hygiene students in a community volunteer program, contact dentalum@interchange.ubc.ca or Dr. Bill Brymer at bbrymer@interchange.ubc.ca

Find more photos at www.dentistry.ubc/kuper