

April/ May Newsletter 2006

TEETHSAVERS INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Dorinah Muloongo, Editor

"A First in the World"

The graduates of Teethsavers Six-Year Molar Focus School in Chipata are now registered by, and the school approved by, the Medical Council of Zambia! This has been one of the most important goals for our work in Zambia. Medical Council representatives inspected Teethsavers school in 2003, subsequently sent us a letter of approval, and granted us registration pending their receiving a copy of a certificate for Teethsavers from Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA). TEVETA was established by the Zambian government to regulate, facilitate, and support several types of development in Zambia, and the Medical Council requires TEVETA's certificate for all medical and health-related educational institutions. The Council said all we needed to do was bring a copy of the certificate to the council's registry to ensure that our graduates would be registered with them in the same way as medical doctors, nurses, and dentists. Getting TEVETA's approval went smoothly, getting the certificate did not! Teethsavers paid the fee for the certificate in 2003, 2004, and 2005 but never received the certificate. Finally, after much time, money, and frustration, we received the necessary piece of paper. Our long-time friend and consultant, Dr. Pashane Mtolo, DDS, MPH, and Chief Dental Officer of Zambia, took it to the Council in March 2006. With the registration and recognition by the Council, Teethsavers has established a NEW CATEGORY OF DENTAL EDUCATION IN THE WORLD and a new delivery system for oral health for developing nations. Our seven Teethsavers graduates have a new category of their own, also: Community Oral Health Educator (COHE) and Atraumatic Restorative Treatment (ART) Technologist. This is a major milestone for Teethsavers!

"Children Teaching Us"

In March, our team of seven COHEs and six assistants worked at four private schools in Chipata. One of the schools had an "infant" class for pre-schoolers aged two to five. When we asked the pre-schoolers what teeth were for, they responded by pretending to chew vigorously. When asked if they knew where to find a six-year molar, they said, "Yes, we can buy one at Shopright!" (a local store). We taught the teacher how to clean their teeth, because the children eat at the school and are there for the whole day. Later, many parents came and said they had never cleaned an infant's teeth, so we taught them how to do it. The parents said they hoped Teethsavers could come to the

school when nurses from the hospital come to present infant/pre-school care programs to large groups of parents and children. At one of the private schools at a church, the bishop and pastor were so impressed with our work that they asked for more details of our program so that they could advertise our next visit. In addition to visiting the private schools, the team divided into three groups and went to three Basic Rural Schools where we taught and treated those who needed treatment.

"Samson"

Our Teethsavers team met eight-year-old Samson in the village of Chiwako. Calculus had built up all over one side of his teeth on one side of his mouth, causing pain and forcing him to chew only on the other side of his mouth. His mother watched with concern as we began scaling off the calculus and Samson, although he couldn't speak, seemed to be asking me for help. After three days of work with him, a dream came true! Samson said he could feel the difference in his mouth, and it felt good. It made me feel good, too, because for the first time in his life Samson will chew well and enjoy his food. With continued proper care of his teeth, Samson can now look forward to a lifetime of better health. Almost like a miracle!

Mwate Chisanga, COHE and ART Technologist

FROM BEHIND THE MOLAR

In Heathrow Airport, London, en route to Chipata, my reflections on Teethsavers past six years: Many people I know have endured hours and hours in a prone position with mouth wide open, in the dental chair, receiving heroic efforts to save their four six-year molars. These molars anchor the bite and do 65% to 70% of adult chewing, proving their importance to our health. Those with all four six-year molars, or replacements, use them daily without appreciation. I, too, old metal mouth, have endured many hours in that chair, staring at the ceiling, to recover from ongoing problems that began with a six-year molar extraction at age ten. We (they and I) have had Repetitive Restorative Cycle (RRC) fillings, crowns, root canals, bridgework, extractions of body parts, gaping holes, removable replacements, implants, and nothingness. This path of diminishing oral health and destruction of our chewing ability most often has as its genesis one or more of the four permanent six-year molars. I don't miss an extracted upper twelve-year molar, which would do 10% of chewing. The eighteen-year molars, wisdom teeth, for most people are a big problem.

The USA has one dentist per 1,810 populations and Eastern Province of Zambia, our target, has one government dental therapist per 129,000 populations. Dr. Pashane Mtolo, DDS, MPH, Chief Dental Officer of

Zambia, and our consultant, did a survey showing that these government dental therapists, charging a fee, spend over 90% of their time with pain, infection, and extractions, of which some 80% are six-year molars. Of their equipment, which is only 10% functional, 60% needs repair and 30% is obsolete. I know I saw it. Teethsavers teaches and treats for about \$1.20 per child. That cost includes everything except my airplane tickets to and from Zambia now paid by you and other donors for which I am most grateful. Please assist us to save even more six-year molars as we begin to submit grant proposals to foundations.

As of my return to Chipata, two prospective students from Malawi are working as paid dental assistants for three months before qualifying for admission to our school. Two more prospective students from Lena, Angola, are on their five-day trip to Chapatti. Dr. Karin van Ness, from the Netherlands, is here to complete her Masters degree in Medical Anthropology and Sociology from the oral health point of view, which has had little attention in the research world. We will keep you posted as she progresses, employing one of our graduates by the name of Doranah Muloongo to assist her.

Jack

Your much needed and much appreciated contributions may be sent to:

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