



GLOBAL DENTAL RELIEF: Colorado dentists working in volunteer teams to bring top-notch care to children around the world

By Kerri Shwayder Greenberg & Will Mateo



Every year since 2001, dedicated and compassionate dentists have joined Denver based non-profit Global Dental Relief (GDR) to bring top-notch dental care to children around the world. Four MDDS members epitomize the compassionate, hardworking and intrepid individuals who come together from around the world in teams of dental and nonmedical volunteers to provide care to underserved children in Cambodia, Guatemala, India, Kenya and Nepal.



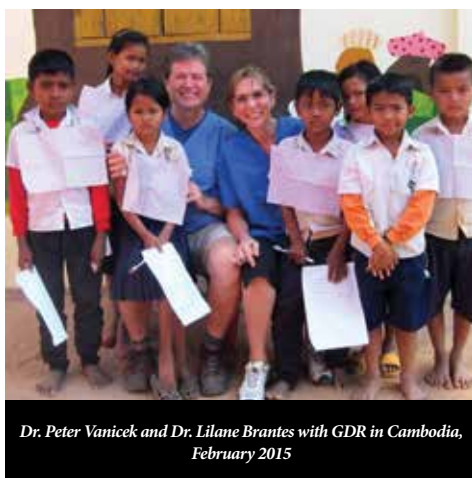
Drs. Peter Vanicek, Liliane Brantes, Lynda Berman and Anil Nutakki have each traveled thousands of miles to work in week-long dental clinics in impoverished communities. Their efforts give children who would otherwise go without access to a dentist the gift of a healthy smile and the tools and knowledge to maintain a healthy mouth. In the process, these committed volunteers receive a priceless gift of their own. Traveling on a GDR trip to Guatemala in 2011 as a fourth year dental student, Dr. Anil Nutakki shared that, "it was enriching to experience a new culture, travel to a new place and feel truly appreciated for the services I provided. It was also an opportunity to form lasting bonds with a number of dental school classmates and create memories that will last a lifetime."

During their time together in Guatemala with GDR, Dr. Nutakki and several of his classmates decided to make trips with GDR a semi-regular event. Now with several years under their belts as practicing dentists, Dr. Nutakki and two of his dental school classmates recently returned from a second trip with Global Dental Relief – this time to Kenya. Each of GDR's locations and partnerships reflects the unique characteristics of that particular community. While clinics in Guatemala are set up field-style with portable dental units in a local town hall in the Mayan Highlands, the Kenya clinic is a modern dental operatory with Aided chairs located in the Kikuyu Medical compound just outside of Nairobi.

MDDS member and local dentist, Dr. Lynda Berman has also volunteered with GDR in both Guatemala and Kenya. Dr. Berman set off on her first trip to Guatemala in May of 2009 with her then 16-year-old daughter. A fabulous mother-daughter adventure, Dr. Berman remembers it as a "great experience for her daughter as she learned more about what her mother does while engaging with the children, sterilizing instruments and practicing her Spanish." When GDR invited former volunteers to participate in the 2013 inaugural trip to Kenya, she was one of the first to sign up – this time bringing

her beloved dental hygienist to volunteer in the clinic as well. Asked what inspires her to volunteer, Dr. Berman replies that, "volunteerism is a part of professionalism and a privilege that brings intense personal satisfaction."

One of the many wonderful features of the GDR volunteer experience is that it attracts a diverse group of people from a wide variety of professional backgrounds and different stages in their careers. Dr. Peter Vanicek and his wife and fellow dentist, Dr. Liliane Brantes, have found that "volunteering and traveling with Global Dental Relief has been a most enjoyable way to transition into retirement." Dr. Vanicek and Brantes took their first volunteer trip with GDR to India after 30 years in private practice together, and have been "hooked" ever since volunteering in Guatemala, Nepal and most recently Cambodia.



Dr. Peter Vanicek and Dr. Liliane Brantes with GDR in Cambodia, February 2015

Dr. Vanicek, who has also become a GDR trip leader and volunteers his time in the Denver office to coordinate the ordering and delivery of supplies to GDR's five international locations, describes the experience with great passion: "It is such a privilege to be a guest in a local community for a period of time instead of just a traveler passing through. We have the opportunity to learn from each other, share a smile, laugh or hug and further a little global understanding. We often see a child, even after a difficult appointment, return to the clinic the next day with a new understanding about dentistry, ready and willing to receive treatment with a smile. Our fellow volunteers are such interesting people with varied backgrounds and experiences. They all share a love of giving. And the opportunity to explore the host country and partake in local sites together after a week of hard work is a perfect finale to the meticulously planned experience. It's impossible not to make new friends and have a new perspective in our lives after a volunteer experience with GDR."

To join fellow dentists Drs. Nutakki, Berman, Vanicek and Brantes and the over 1,500 dental and nonmedical volunteers combined who have made a real difference in the lives of children, visit the Global Dental Relief website www.globaldentalrelief.org for detailed information. ■

About the Authors

Building upon a career in public policy and philanthropy, Kerri Breenberg joined the GDR Denver team in 2012 as Associate Director / Strategic Planning. She has volunteered and led numerous GDR dental clinics in Vietnam, Guatemala, Kenya and Cambodia.

Will Mateo - is a recent graduate of the University of Denver's Korbel Graduate School of International Studies. Will joined the GDR Denver office as a Country Coordinator in 2014. He will participate in his second GDR clinic this summer in Guatemala.

