



Making a Difference in the World

By Laurie Mathews

Dr. Mark Lisagor's bags are packed and he is headed back to Kathmandu, Nepal. This will be Dr. Lisagor's 11th visit to this magic country, where he leads volunteer dental teams providing care to children.

Lisagor has worked on more than 50 dental missions. Since the 1990's, he has completed 20 mission trips to Guatemala with his wife Terri. In 2005, he joined his first Global Dental Relief (GDR) trip to India, then returned for a second trip to Nepal and never looked back. Since 2008, Lisagor has led 24 volunteer dental teams with Global Dental Relief.

The Nepal team is one of the 18 Global Dental Relief teams working on behalf of kids in 2016. Global Dental Relief was started in 2001 to bring volunteers together to provide dental care to children in need around the globe. Today, Global Dental Relief teams work in five countries—Nepal, India, Cambodia, Guatemala and Kenya. In 2015, volunteers including 78 dentists, 28 hygienists, 9 dental assistants and 119 non-dental volunteers, brought care to 15,000 children.

On each Global Dental Relief trip, one of Lisagor's favorite moments happen when he first meets his new team members—folks who have made the decision to donate their time and talent to help children. Everyone is excited and a bit anxious, as they discuss clinic protocols and take the first steps that will eventually meld them into a lean and effective team delivering care.

In Nepal this spring, Lisagor and his co-leader Sue McEvoy join their new group of five dentists, two hygienists and seven non-dental volunteers. It is a diverse group from four countries and five states in the U.S., with three returning volunteers and the rest first-timers.

Lisagor does this work, "because it is a remarkable feeling to help a group of strangers join together with the purpose of improving the lives of many children. It forever changes your look at the world, your practice and your family. Once you do this work, there is no turning back!"

They begin their time together orienting volunteers to the labyrinthine walkways of Boudha, which lies on the outskirts of Kathmandu where they will spend the next eight days. Boudha is also home to the world heritage Boudhanath Stupa, a centuries old Buddhist shrine and the focal point for local community gatherings.

The group joins in the circumambulation of this stupa that takes place at the beginning and end of each day, as neighbors meet and chat and the devout circle the stupa, prayer beads in hand. It is the beginning of their immersion into this fascinating and very different culture.

Each GDR team has two leaders and in Nepal, Lisagor's co-leader is Sue McEvoy, a writer and outdoor adventurer from Redstone, Colo. These two have led Global Dental Relief trips in Nepal and India, honing their skills with Lisagor running the dental side of the clinic, and McEvoy ensuring each school group arrives as scheduled and managing group logistics. Together they share their extensive knowledge and love of Nepal with volunteers.

In addition to his work in Nepal, Lisagor also leads Global Dental Relief trips to the remote region of India called Ladakh. To hear his experiences firsthand, see side bar on his trip to "the rooftop of the world."

Back in Nepal the 2016 team begins their first clinic day, arriving at the clinic by 8:30. Volunteers are greeted by a line of children, each clutching their dental chart and excitedly chattering about the day ahead. Children call out the traditional greeting of *namaste* with shy smiles and the traditional folded hands.

Lisagor and McEvoy work skillfully to help each volunteer adapt to their assigned duties. One dentist begins *intake*, giving each child an exam and treatment plan for the day. The intake chair is a busy place, with children receiving exams, injections or verdicts of perfect teeth, all while interacting with dozens of bright eager faces.

Once they are numbed, dentists treat each child, extracting infected teeth and restoring cavities. The goal is to do all necessary dental care, and children are brought back on subsequent days as needed. At the same time, dental hygienists clean teeth and continue oral health instruction.

This approach is Global Dental Relief's model of care:

- Treat each school, child by child.
- Provide all necessary care over one to three visits during the clinic week, including restorations, extractions, cleanings and a fluoride treatment.
- Give each child a new toothbrush, teach them to brush, teach their teachers to brush and offer oral hygiene education.
- Return to these same populations every two years to provide long term, sustained care and education.

In Lisagor and McEvoy's clinic, non-dental volunteers quickly learn essential duties. Some assist chairside for a dentist or hygienist. Others pitch in to sterilize and restock the extensive inventory of dental instruments. Or they manage patient records to ensure each child's care is

completed during the clinic week. Volunteers teach oral health education and tooth brushing, apply fluoride, or oversee the general flow of patients in the very full and bustling clinic.

This is the first dental visit for most of these children. In Nepal there are few dentists to serve the population of 27 million, and a visit to the dentist is financially out of reach for most children. The recent upsurge in sugar is readily apparent, as more decay is present than in past generations. In Nepal, typically about 50 percent of the children need immediate care, and some need to return for multiple visits throughout the week to be restored to full dental health.

Volunteers are moved by the trust of each child in the clinic. With wide eyes, they each take their turn in the dental chair, often gripping the hand of the chairside assistant. Some children are so excited, they cross the entire room to the dental chair with mouths already wide open.

And everyone enjoys watching an excited child grin and leap out of the chair when work is complete. They can be seen racing out of the clinic, eager to point to their new dental work and compare the day's events with friends.

Clinic days typically end around 4:30, after treating up to 120 children a day. Each day is demanding as volunteers work under field conditions with portable units and field lighting. Yet days are rich with special interactions and small gestures of joining between children and volunteers, bridging generations and cultures.

One of the reason's Lisagor and McEvoy love this work is that it allows them "to share the joy and fulfillment of this work with new volunteers," says McEvoy. "We always say only good people volunteer, and we see this with each of our teams. It is a special chance to make new friends or, best of all, reunite with volunteers returning over and over again."





As the week comes to a close, this team will treat over 900 children with 433 restorations, 172 extractions, many sealants and fluoride treatments, and lots of tooth brush instruction. The group winds down their last clinic day with a farewell dinner and a briefing about their upcoming five day trek along the Everest trail. Each Global Dental Relief trip includes an optional sightseeing adventure after the clinic. In Nepal this is a five-day trek or a shorter jungle excursion. In other countries, this includes three safari days in Kenya or weekends in beautiful Antigua, Guatemala.

The final dinner is bittersweet as volunteers exchange email and Facebook contacts with the local students and partners who worked as part of the team during the past seven days. Stories are told, a few songs sung, photos are taken and shared memories extend into the night.

As Lisagor says, “possibly the most impactful result of our work is that we touch people

in these remote places simply by going there to help. The message to all of these children is—I must matter or these people wouldn’t take the time to come from so far just to help me have better health.”

This is the work that Lisagor and McEvoy love, and what brings them to this service over and over again. They are devoted to the mission of helping children, steeped in their commitment to return to see these same populations year after year, making a lasting difference in the health of the communities they serve.

They ask you to consider joining them in this commitment—to make a difference and see the world as you never have before. You can join them on a trip in Nepal or India in 2016 or consider the three other GDR locations: Cambodia, Kenya or Guatemala. For more information, email volunteer@globaldentalrelief.org, call (303) 858-8857 or view schedules and itineraries online at globaldentalrelief.org.



ABOUT MARK LISAGOR

Dr. Mark Lisagor received both his Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health and his degree in Dentistry, at UCLA. Following service in the United States Public Health Service (Indian Health Branch), he completed his residency training in Pediatric Dentistry at UCLA-Harbor General Hospital.

Lisagor is a Diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, and was the founding partner of a large pediatric dental group practice serving Ventura County since 1977. He is past president of the American Society of Dentistry for Children in Southern California, the California Society of Pediatric Dentistry, and the California Society of Pediatric Dentistry Foundation, and has served as a legislative advocate for children’s oral health to the U.S. Congress for many years.

Back home in California, he is completing his second four-year term as a Trustee on the Ventura County Board of Education.

ABOUT GLOBAL DENTAL RELIEF

Global Dental Relief was founded in 2001 to bring teams of volunteers overseas to provide dental care to children in need. Since 2001, teams have served over 100,000 children with first time and follow up care. Global Dental relief is a 501 c 3 tax exempt charitable organization. For more information, email volunteer@globaldentalrelief.org, or call (303) 858-8857. View trip schedules and itineraries at www.globaldentalrelief.org



Working on the Rooftop of the World

By Mark Lisagor, D.D.S.

“Practice kindness whenever it is possible. It is always possible.”

H.H. Dalai Lama

This is the lesson that I learn and relearn whenever I am here in Leh, Ladakh, and just one of the reasons I keep coming back to this magical place.

At the time of this writing, I’m leading my 13th volunteer dental clinic here in Leh, in the Himalayan Indian region of Ladakh. One can’t help but be impressed by the peaceful nature of this ancient town on the Silk Road at more than 12,000 feet, where people simply get along, and even help each other when times are tough. I walk along the main bazaar and see a Sunni mosque and a Shia mosque within a few feet of each other, with a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the middle and a Moravian Christian church just up the road.

I wake up to the Muslim call to prayer mixed with the sound of apples dropping from heavily laden trees as they hit the tin roof next to my window. I look out and see snow-covered peaks on the edge of the Himalayas and watch Kashmiri water boys pushing oil drums full of drinking water down to the town, carefully avoiding the cows that also call the roads home here.

I look forward to seeing friends that no longer treat me as a tourist, but as a colleague, working together with them to improve the quality of life for so many children here. Children who are certainly better for the care we deliver, but maybe more importantly, children who learn that they truly matter—why else would people travel so far to provide care for them, year after year?

Every year I am able to peel back another layer of the onion that is a different culture than my own. These discoveries are yet another reason I keep coming back to the same place rather than venturing out to so many other distant lands that certainly beckon.

“Ladakh is the last Shangri-La in the world.”

Pico Iyer, the famous travel writer, certainly had it right.