The faculty of Dentistry held another very successful outreach programme in Vredenburg during the last weekend in May 2011. Twelve students from 3 different year-groups left the faculty at 14:00 on Friday 27 April and travelled to Vredenburg, set up the portable equipment at the Hanna Coetze clinic in Louville. The team then spent the night at a guest house in Saldanha.

General view out over a part of Louville – home to many more patients than we could treat.

On the Saturday morning we were welcomed by many patients (above), who were already being screened by Ms Karen Paulse the Oral Hygienist from the Diazville clinic in Saldanha.
We adopted the same modus operandi that worked so well during the previous visit, and soon patients started moving into consulting rooms and the faculty’s mobile clinic parked outside, students donned masks and gloves and treatment began.

We also had Dr Ronel Maart and Dr Saadiqa Khan join us for the day and they found lots to do. Dr Costa Saridakis also joined us – and what is noteworthy about this is that he is a private practitioner with a passion for serving the community. He also did not get any remuneration for his services – truly an example to us all.

Work continued unabated, in fact we almost had to (once again) force the students to stop for lunch – they were on a mission! Lunch was provided (and delivered in person) by our Dean, Prof Yusuf Osman and Deputy Dean, Dr Fifty Carstens together with Ms Natalie Gordon for the Oral Hygiene Department at UWC.– their support and interest was greatly appreciated.

By evening we were tired, but satisfied to know we had helped so many people. After cleaning up we retired to our guest house to rest lowed by dinner at the hotel, which was enjoyed by all.
Early on Sunday morning we were back. More patients waited for us (see above).

By early Sunday afternoon the waiting room was empty again. The pack-up, clean-up and load-up followed, and after an uneventful trip we arrived back at a cold, wet Tygerberg at 17:00.

During the two days we treated 176 patients, extracted 370 teeth, scaled and polished 7 patients and were only able to fill 27 teeth. This is much the same as seen the previous month – such is the extent of the need in this community. It is sad to see such a severe treatment backlog in our Province.

A plan for the future is to arrange a Saturday when we can take our Anaesthesiologist and her conscious sedation team there to enable us to treat the very young children – we have the contact details of nine of them already! We need to arrange this in conjunction with Vredenburg Hospital as we will need their theatre, recovery rooms, etc. We estimate being able to treat 30 children in a day using conscious sedation. This will meet another need in this community. Watch this space!
A big thank-you is due to the students and the rest of the team (above) who gave up their weekend to provide this service. Their enthusiasm, hard work and empathy shown towards their patients were exemplary. They also learned lots, honed skills and experienced the immense satisfaction of being able to help others in a very practical way. We are proud of them!

The support from the Department of Health was wonderful. Special thanks are due to Mrs Karen Paulse who again did so much for us in the planning and in keeping things running smoothly on the weekend. Her enthusiasm continues to be an inspiration to us all.

Finally, a word of thanks is due to the University of the Western Cape for funding this initiative. It was of great benefit to both the students and community. May there be many more of these weekends – the need out there is immense!

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21 June 2011