Humanitarian group provides care in Nicaragua

IMAHelps assembled a team of more than 80 doctors, surgeons, nurses, dentists and support personnel for a 10-day medical mission to Estelí, Nicaragua, in August.

“This will be our largest medical mission since we started organizing medical humanitarian missions 11 years ago,” said Ines Allen, president and co-founder of Rancho Mirage-based IMAHelps.

A small team of volunteers departed the Coachella Valley for Estelí in late July to prepare for the medical mission, which took place Aug. 4 to 14.

This year’s team of volunteers included plastic, maxillofacial, orthopedic and general surgeons as well as cardiologists, obstetricians, general physicians, pediatricians, gynecologists and support personnel, including four pharmacists. A prosthodontist who can fit patients with donated artificial limbs, a dermatologist, dentists and a specialist in endodontics were also on the mission.

IMAHelps organizes medical missions each year. Founded in 2000, the group started with medical missions to South America, but has since broadened its efforts to include medical missions to Central America and Asia. The group is also organizing a medical mission to China in September.

During their 10-day medical mission to Somoto, Nicaragua, in August, IMAHelps volunteers provided medical services to 8,446 people, including

One-third of Americans have cut back on dental visits

A recent public opinion survey commissioned by Oral Health America found that in the past year, more than one-third (35 percent) of those who regularly visit the dentist have cut back. Though this finding tracks with the fears and realities of our current economy, routine dental visits play a vital role in preventing oral and systemic disease and keeping future health-care costs down.

This finding was one of the many reasons why on Sept. 1, Oral Health America launched its second annual Fall for Smiles campaign, aiming to remind policymakers and the public about the importance of dental self-care, regular dental visits, healthy food choices and avoiding tobacco products.

* See pages 13A, 16A
California Dental Association honors school districts for commitment to oral health

The California Dental Association (CDA) has recognized the top California school districts for their ongoing efforts in support of the state’s Children’s Oral Health Assessment law (AB 1433) to ensure children’s oral health needs are being met. Sixty-four California school districts have collected and submitted data each year since the dental check-up program began in 2006.

The top-performing districts include Sierra Foothills Unified, San Francisco Unified and Plumas Unified. These districts consistently make oral health a priority by obtaining and reporting the dental checkup data required by law every year.

CDA recognizes the districts’ leadership in ensuring their school children are healthy and ready to learn.

“It is important to understand the relationship between children’s oral health and their readiness to learn in school,” said CDA President Andrew Soderstrom, DDS, a pediatric dentist. “We appreciate the efforts made by these school districts to ensure their students maintain good oral health; it provides them with the opportunity to learn and perform at their full potential.”

Dental disease is a hidden epidemic among school-age children. Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease, more common than asthma and obesity, affecting nearly two-thirds of California’s children by the time they reach third grade.

Although tooth decay is easily preventable, it is a progressive infection that does not heal without treatment. Left untreated, children’s dental disease can have debilitating effects, including chronic pain, difficulty learning and inability to eat properly, smile and feel good about themselves.

California children miss an estimated 874,000 school days each year due to dental problems, costing local school districts approximately $28.8 million. The CDA continues to work with its partners in education and health to support AB 1433, which requires children to have a dental checkup by May 31 of their first year of enrollment in a public school (kindergarten or first grade).

The intent of the law is to determine unmet dental needs, support children’s school readiness and encourage regular dental care. Further, it carries an essential message to parents about the important relationship between a child’s oral health and overall health and provides simple tips for keeping children healthy.

A list of the top performing school districts and counties supporting the Children’s Oral Health Assessment law is available at cda.org/1433. (Source: California Dental Association)

Fall for Smiles runs through the end of October. Dental offices, health educators, school dental program officials, parents and others can find a variety of tools to promote healthy mouths, including a social media guide, coloring sheets and campaign handbook by visiting wwworalhealthamerica.org/fallforsmiles.

“Fall for Smiles reminds families to prioritize the health of their mouths in back-to-school routines,” said Beth Truett, president and CEO of Oral Health America. “The commitment to dental health starts at home, and continues with regular visits to a dental care provider. We have a societal responsibility to educate Americans about why oral health is important, and to ensure that all Americans, particularly those most vulnerable to disease, are able to obtain the care they need.”

Additional findings in the public opinion survey found that a greater number — nearly one-half (47 percent) — of larger households and those with younger children have cut back on their visits to the dentist in the past year. Those who have younger children cut back more frequently than those households that have slightly older children.

This further emphasizes the impact the economic downturn is having on young families who are struggling to get established and the need for policies and programs that support dental care and educational resources for them.

“The findings from the public opinion survey reinforce why Oral Healthcare Can’t Wait is involved with Fall for Smiles,” said Gary Price, president of the Dental Trade Alliance. “The messages that Fall for Smiles promotes are vital when Americans are making choices about how to allocate resources and stay healthy.”

Oral Health America is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to changing lives by connecting communities with resources to increase access to dental care, education and advocacy. The Fall for Smiles Survey is sponsored by Oral Healthcare Can’t Wait and Plackers, a brand of consumer oral care products, and conducted by Harris Interactive. The survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of Oral Health America in June 2011.

Fall for Smiles is supported by Aspen Dental, DentaQuest, Ivoclar Vivadent, Midmark, OralDNA Labs, Patterson Dental, Plackers and Young Dental. (Source: PRWEB)
Paint-on fluid regenerates teeth

A fluid developed by researchers at the University of Leeds has shown promising results in initial testing.

A team of researchers led by Dr. Amalia Aggeli, at the university’s School of Chemistry, created the peptide-based liquid, which can be painted on teeth and appears to reverse the initial stages of dental decay.

“This may sound too good to be true, but we are essentially helping acid-damaged teeth to regenerate themselves. It is a totally natural non-surgical repair process and is entirely pain-free too,” said Professor Jennifer Kirkham, from the University of Leeds Dental Institute, who has led development of the new technique.

Professor Paul Brunton is overseeing the testing on patients at the University of Leeds Dental Institute. “If these results can be repeated on a larger patient group, then I have no doubt whatsoever that in two to three years time this technique will be available for dentists to use in their daily practice,” Brunton said. (Source: University of Leeds)

120 cleft palate repairs and other life-changing surgeries; 695 dental procedures, as well as 949 pediatric and 1,465 internal medicine consultations involving everything from urinary tract infections to ear aches, stomach aches, joint pains, tropical skin rashes and allergy-related ailments.

This year’s medical mission to Estelí, Nicaragua, was made possible with a $38,000 grant from Hedco Foundation, which was used to purchase anesthesia equipment as well as an EKG machine.

Hospitals and more than 300 individual donors from the Coachella Valley and throughout Southern California also made significant donations of equipment and supplies as well as monetary contributions, all of which were used to pay for medicines and supplies.

In the Coachella Valley, Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs and John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Indio both donated equipment and supplies for the Nicaragua mission.

Other Southern California hospitals also donated critical equipment and supplies for the mission, including Mountains Community Hospital in Lake Arrowhead, which donated thousands of dollars worth of maternity ward equipment and supplies as well as Lompoc Valley Medical Center in Lompoc, which donated medicines and pharmaceutical supplies.

Dr. Doriana Cosgrove of Desert Med Aesthetics and Dr. Daniel Cosgrove of Well Max in La Quinta also coordinated a fundraising effort that helped raise $9,000 worth of donations, which were used to pay for the shipping of medicines and supplies from California to Nicaragua.

Rotary Club District 5330, which includes Rotarians from clubs in San Bernardino and Riverside counties, also raised $8,200, which was used to purchase a portable X-ray machine.

Dentists from the Coachella Valley, Temecula and Oregon also donated thousands of dollars worth of dental supplies for the Nicaragua mission in an effort led by Dr. Rene Dell’Acqua, a cosmetic dentist from Palm Desert.

The IMAHelps volunteers paid for their own airfare to and from Nicaragua, although their food and hotel expenses were covered by the Lion’s Club of Estelí as well as a non-profit group called Unidos Por Nicaragua (United for Nicaragua).

Rancho Mirage-based IMAHelps is a registered non-profit organization that depends exclusively on volunteers to make a difference in people’s lives.

Formerly known as International Medical Alliance, Ines Allen changed the organization’s name to IMAHelps earlier this year so that her organization’s efforts would not be confused with those of other organizations with similar names.

More information is available at www.imahelps.org.