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## ***Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Jamaica Dental Mission Trip***

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College Connection

by Nicole Wheeler SIUE Student Pharmacist, P3 SIUE SSHP Treasurer



This past summer I had the privilege to take part in the Jamaica Dental Mission Trip. The Jamaica dental mission aims to improve the oral health and wellbeing of underserved, underinsured, and uninsured Jamaican children and adults by providing access to care and building community relationships. This annual mission trip started in 2000 with dentists and dental students traveling to Jamaica every summer to provide oral exams and procedures free of charge. Since its initiation, the program has grown to include the SIUE School of Pharmacy in 2006. The collaboration with the pharmacy school added opportunities for the

patients to be screened for other medical conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. In addition, the pharmacists and pharmacy students were able to provide medication, counseling, and contraceptives to any individual coming in for an oral exam. In 2017, a total of 57 volunteers traveled to Jamaica for seven days in July. These volunteers included twenty dental students and ten pharmacy students.

We arrived in Jamaica on Saturday to unpack, set up, and prepare for the upcoming week at clinic. Each day of clinic we would leave the resort around 7:30 AM and arrive back around 7:00 PM. Depending on the clinic site, it was either a ten-minute or an hour drive. Once we arrived at the clinic, there was a debriefing to go over what took place the day before and what needed to be done that day. The dental students would prepare their chairs while we would set up the pharmacy. Every person that came in for a checkup would be seen by a pharmacy student first. We would go over

their patient history, check their blood pressure, and check their glucose if they had diabetes. Next, the patient would go to triage to find out what dental work they would need before moving to the next open chair to have their procedures completed. After the dental students finished, each patient would return to the pharmacy to be given pain medication and any antibiotics as needed. Every patient received counseling on oral hygiene, medications, a toothbrush, toothpaste, and condoms. If a child came in, they would also receive a toy along with their toothbrush and toothpaste.



During the four days at clinic, we screened and treated around 700 patients. To date, this mission trip has treated about 17,500 Jamaican residents. This year, the dental students performed around 650 extractions and 400 fillings. Due to the relationships that have been made with the Jamaican community, some of these patients come back year after year to have an oral exam and health screening. This year we were even able to have a mobile bus parked outside one of the clinics for a day that performed HIV testing. This entire mission trip would not be possible without help from the local residents. This could include anything from cleaning up, cooking lunch, or helping to maintain the crowds waiting for their turn to be seen.

This experience was very eye-opening and one that I will remember forever. It was breathtaking to see the differences in our cultures. Every patient was genuine and very appreciative of everything that we were doing for them. I cannot even count how many hugs and thankful wishes I received from the patients I screened or counseled. Being in a different country helped me step out of my comfort zone. This trip also made me more comfortable when screening and counseling patients on their medical conditions and medications. I am very excited to travel back to Jamaica next year to learn even more about their culture and help many more patients!

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