



COMMUNITY ORAL HEALTH OUTREACH PROGRAM (COHOP) REPORT
2020/2021



INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of the Department of Community Dentistry is to promote health and prevent oral disease through teaching, research, and service. The Community Oral Health Outreach Program (COHOP) has enabled the department to achieve many of its teaching, research, and service delivery objectives. Following on a demand for essential oral health services, which was confirmed by epidemiological studies demonstrating huge needs, the initial outreach program began in 1983. This has continued as one of the flagship projects in the Wits School of Oral Health Sciences.

The main objectives of the program are as follows:

To provide quality comprehensive oral health services by caring and committed personnel

To carry out oral health assessments in the various communities

To promote oral health and create greater oral health awareness

To operate with a team approach effectively utilizing the best mix of oral health workers

To empower and utilize local resources

To foster staff development at all levels

To work in closer cooperation with Gauteng Department of Health

To encourage and facilitate community involvement

To provide oral health services and carry out relevant research which would assist in addressing problems faced by vulnerable groups such as school children, the elderly and individuals with learning and physical disabilities.

To provide and offer an excellent facility for training, research and service learning for under and post graduate dental and oral hygienist students

The program is operated from two mobile dental trucks and portable equipment which are equipped to provide oral health screening for common diseases including dental caries, periodontal disease and management of oral manifestations of HIV/AIDS and restorations. One of our truck is based at a primary health care facility in Diepsloot, the other truck rotates around local schools and communities within 5km radius to the University.

In the past two years during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic our services were largely affected as we had to contend with the hard lock down and deliberate on how to resume and incorporate our services under COVID-19 pre-cautionary measures while still being intentional on offering quality of care. These factors led us to providing limited services in the years 2020 & 2021.

DIEPSLOOT

Diepsloot is informal settlement located in the north of Johannesburg. It is located in the newly formed

Region A (formerly regions 1 and 2) and is a densely populated settlement made up of government-subsidized housing, brick houses built by landowners as well as shacks. Diepsloot is now home to about 350,000 people; many of them live in shacks 3 m by 2 m assembled from scrap metal, wood, plastic and cardboard. Some families lack access to basic services such as running water, sewage and rubbish removal. There are only 2 clinics in Diepsloot servicing the entire community with no dental services available, hence the Diepsloot Oral Health Outreach Project was initiated. The mobile dental truck is based at the OR Tambo community health centre which offers antenatal, baby immunization, HIV and primary care services for chronic conditions (Fig 1).

The Diepsloot project is aimed at taking oral health services to the people who need them most by using a mobile dental unit and is located at the OR Tambo community health centre. The project first started its operations on the 28th May 2013 and was met with much excitement from the community as clients waited patiently in long queues. The services are rendered on Monday to Thursdays mornings and the influx of patients has been increasing ever since the project began. The project also serves as a platform for clinical training for the Wits undergraduate dental and oral hygiene students. Services that are offered include:

- Oral screening for common diseases including caries, periodontal disease, and oral manifestations of HIV/AIDS
- Oral health education and brushing programs
- Curative services including Atraumatic Restorative Treatment (ART); scaling and polishing; fissure sealants; extractions; emergency treatments and referrals.
- The primary health care services offered include emergency oral care, radiographs, extractions, restorations, and preventative care.

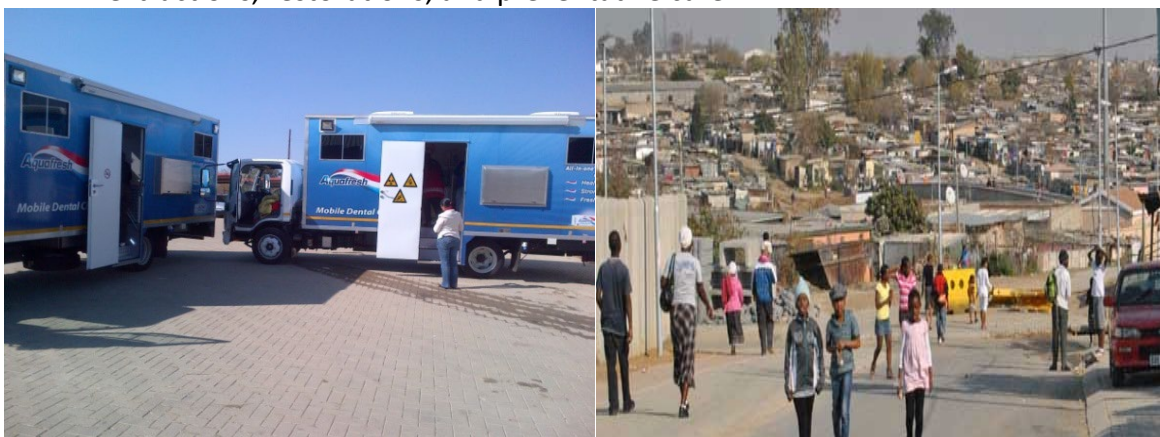


Figure 1: Diepsloot Township (left); Mobile dental units at OR Tambo (right)

In 2020 & 2021 the services were derailed by the multiple lockdowns we were subjected to as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a lot of planning had to go behind preparations of how to resume our services in Diepsloot (Figure 1). Therefore, services were fully resumed in August 2021 and during the five-month period, 720 patients were attended to, with 766 extractions, 47 restorations and 13 scaling and polishing undertaken, see **Figure 2 & 3**. We are

now looking forward to getting back to the clinical training of dental students in the trucks in April 2022.

Figure 2: An illustration of the services offered in Diepsloot (2021).

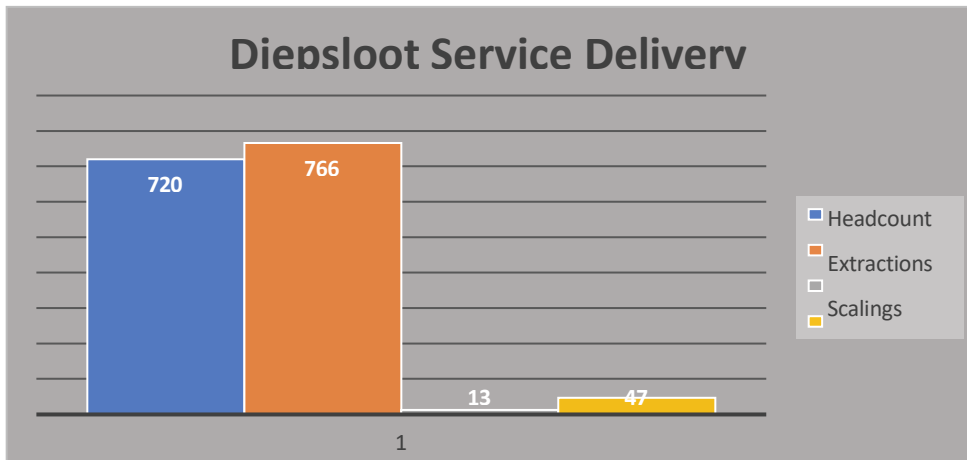


Figure 3: BDS IV student providing dental treatment in the mobile dental truck



ORAL HEALTH PEDIATRIC VIROLOGY PROJECT (OHPVP)

The OHPVP clinic is an outreach program within the Pediatric Virology department of Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (CMJAH), providing services every Wednesday. The aim of the clinic is to provide oral health services (clinical and educational) to HIV-positive adolescents and children who are patients of the Pediatric Virology department. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, services were suspended for most of 2020 and 2021 and services delivery resumed 17 November 2021.

The clinical room has three operating chairs, two of which are portable with accompanying mobile suction and mobile turbine units. Services provided to patients include oral examination, scaling polishing, restorations (PRR, FS and restorations fillings), extractions, and general and HIV-related oral health education.

A new chair has been placed in the clinic in addition to the two portable chairs. The disruption of services due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fire at CMJAH delayed the process to have the chair permanently installed in the clinic, however this will be resumed soon.



Picture: Dental Chair at the Paediatric Virology ward 274

COVID-19-related precautionary measures have resulted in fewer patients being booked to the Pediatric Virology department thus only 12 patients are booked, of which the dental ward examines and treats approximately 4-7 patients during the morning session.

The ward has one dentist and one dental assistant (from the three dental assistants who rotate on a weekly basis). At times, the Oral Hygiene students attend the clinic to see patients for clinical exposure and quota purposes. Having the students in the ward is of great benefit as we can provide higher volumes of care. In all, the OHPVP project has been very valuable to the children seen in ward 274 (Paediatric Virology Department) as the reality is that children living with HIV continue to struggle with oral lesions that affect their quality of life. See **Table 1** for the OHPVP

statistics.

Towards the end of the year of 2021 Colgate donated intra oral cameras and we look forward to starting our own photographic library for teaching and research purposes in the ward.

TABLE 1: OHPVP Statistics from 17 November – 15 December 2021

Total number of patients	Procedures						
	General examination	Oral health education	Scal e & Polish	Fissure sealants	Preventative Resin Restoration	Restorative filling	Extraction
21	21	21	2	4	0	0	3

RANDBURG CLINIC SCHOOL

The school is situated in Randburg, a suburb in Johannesburg, Gauteng. This is a school for children with a primary diagnosis of Autism as well as severe behavioral difficulties. Learners are aged between 3- 18 years in Autism Centre and 6- 13 years in the behavioral section of the school.

The school is registered with the Department of Education and has an adequate infrastructure to support learners living with autism.

The Department of Community Dentistry runs an oral health project in the school that seeks to identify oral health problems and give necessary intervention. This is done every Friday of the week. Children are divided into two groups, those with low support and high support groups. The high support group needs more time, patience from the clinician, attention as well as the support of the teacher as compared to low support group who may need far less time adapting to the dental environment.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions we were not able to visit the school as usual to offer oral health services in 2021. Hopefully the services will restart in 2022 as more people are vaccinated against the pandemic, and that the new registrars will take over the project and continue to offer services on Fridays.

Down syndrome project

The Community Dentistry Department at the School of Oral Health Sciences in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg is involved in an outreach project at Casa do Sol School for children with special needs located in Linden, Johannesburg. Casa do Sol was formally established as a school for intellectually disabled children in 1973 and 1975, the school became a Government Aided Training Centre and now is part of the Gauteng Department of Education. The school was granted a welfare/NPO number in 1974.

Figure 4: Learners at Casa do Sol flagship of Oral Hygiene services



The outreach project includes providing oral health treatment for the 195 learners registered. The research was started in 2013 at the request of the school as most of the learners had dental problems and could not afford complex dental treatment under general anaesthetics. The outreach team offered free primary oral health services and additionally refer to tertiary oral health centres when needed. The outreach provides a multidisciplinary teaching platform involving Speech and Hearing Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Biokineticists. This has also been a platform where the BOHSc (Oral Hygiene) students got an opportunity to enhance their clinical skills and learn to provide oral hygiene management for paediatric patients with special needs.

Figure 5: BOHSc III student with a learner at Casa do Sol



RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DENTISTRY OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS

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CONCLUSION

Our progress has been minimal in the past two years as Community Based Learning and major events were halted, however we are grateful that we were able to resume our services and to also celebrate the small milestones we were able to accomplish under the circumstances. We are looking forward to widening our reach to communities and undertaking innovative activities using the trucks. We are also in the process of creating fully fledged expanded training platforms at the district clinics to have a complementary and collaborative training platform. Finally, we acknowledge GSK and Colgate for their continued support in our Community Oral Health Projects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The department of Community Dentistry would like to thank all the individuals involved with the activities and operations of the department and the compilation of this document. The department would also like to sincerely express our gratitude to our partners and funders (listed below) for making it possible to improve the oral health of Gauteng residents:

- Wits School of Oral Health Sciences
- Department of Health, Dept. of Education and Dept. of Social Services
- Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK)
- Colgate Company
- Johannesburg Metro Health Services