



# Dentistry In a Box

## One Man's Commitment Is Giving Hope to a War-Torn Nation

BY LYDIA WASSAN '13

At 70 years old, most people hope to slow down and enjoy retirement. Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry alumnus James Rolfe '68 is not most people. Rather than spending his time on the beaches of Bermuda, Rolfe travels to a suburb of Kabul, Afghanistan, where he commits his skills, time and resources to improve the health and the future for the poor and destitute. Rolfe's story demonstrates the power of one person's passion and commitment.

"We take our health for granted, fully expecting to live without illness or suffering," he says. "Most Afghans have no access to healthcare of any sort. Dental care is vital to the health of people living in developing countries, and most Afghans do not even own a toothbrush."

A two-week outreach in 2003 as a volunteer dentist at an Afghan orphanage changed Rolfe's life forever. Over the past seven years, he has given much of his time and energy and more than \$700,000 of

his own money to provide dental services and professional training to the people of Afghanistan. Through the Afghan Dental Relief Project (ADRP) which he founded, Rolfe's clinic provides Afghans free dental care and trains dental assistants, dental hygienists and laboratory technicians.

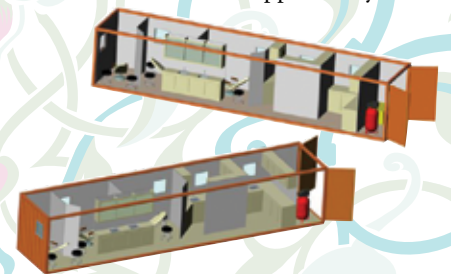
Rolfe maintains a private practice in Santa Barbara, California, which provides most of the revenue for ADRP. He makes all of his fillings and moldings himself, and does not have a dental hygienist. This allows him to provide very personalized service to his clients and keeps overhead low so he can commit more resources to ADRP.

Years of war in Afghanistan have left behind many widows and about 3 million orphans with no source of income. Malnutrition, illiteracy and poverty have left them with few prospects and little hope. The current life expectancy is around 44 years — the sixth lowest in the world — and the median age is 17.

Healthcare is primitive and limited.

There are only 134 dentists for a country of about 29 million (that's one for every 216,000); meaning access to dental care is rare and expensive.

"Eighty percent of kids that I talk to have no hope for the future," Rolfe says. He has seen young adults dying as a result of their dental problems. "They had multiple abscessed teeth and no antibiotics — not even clean water." They only restored electricity in Kabul in the past year. He realized that Afghanistan had no future without education and opportunity.



Rolfe began working to develop a permanent clinic and training center there. He personally outfitted a 40-foot shipping

container as a completely functional clinic, which took 18 months to complete. He traveled all over the state to collect donated and discounted dental supplies and equipment, which filled another two containers. Rolfe's clinic boasts the only electronic x-ray machine and functional laboratory in the country. The containers were shipped fully outfitted to Afghanistan.

Securing the land for the clinic presented another problem, but a Pacific connection provided the solution. Kamila Mohammadi, mother of Pacific speech-language pathology major Husna Mohammadi '11, heard about Rolfe's organization about the same time she was diagnosed with kidney cancer. She and her family had moved from Afghanistan to Northern California in the 1980s. Though she would never return to her homeland, she was able to give back to Afghanistan and its people. As her last wish, Mohammadi donated her family's land in Kabul to Rolfe for the clinic. Since her death in 2007, Mohammadi's husband and daughter have been very committed to the success of ADRP.

ADRP now includes the clinic, a three-bedroom guest facility for volunteer dentists, a classroom and dental laboratory, and a waiting and reception area. The clinic serves 35 people each day and trains dental assistants and laboratory technicians.

In February the first class of dental hygiene students graduated. These graduates are given modern portable equipment, which they can take with them to practice in any licensed dental office. Rolfe hopes to expand the training center to include other educational programs and the organic garden, which provides nutritional supplements to clients. Eventually he plans to build permanent facilities in Kabul so the mobile units can be sent to a new location.



*Top: Pacific students coordinated the Global Development Dinner in March to raise awareness about Rolfe's work in Afghanistan. (l. to r.) Gal Sapir '10, Suhaila Aziz '10, Rolfe, Mari Shikuzawa '10 and Husna Mohammadi '11. Center: In addition to free dental services, Rolfe's clinic trains dental assistants, dental hygienists and laboratory technicians. Bottom: Rolfe's clinic graduated its first class of dental hygienists in February.*

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Rolfe's passion is contagious. Husna Mohammadi has organized fundraisers and events to raise awareness for the project. Other Pacific students, including Suhaila Aziz '10, have joined the effort. In conjunction with the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and the School of International Studies, Aziz, Mohammadi and several other students organized a Global Development Dinner in March on the Stockton campus that featured Afghan music, food and auction items.

"Pacific faculty, students and community members all came to learn about ADRP, and we raised more than \$1,000 for the organization," says Aziz.

"They always say 'one person can change the world' and, after meeting Dr. Rolfe, I believe this statement," says Mohammadi. "His dedication and willingness to commit so much of his personal resources is outstanding."

"I became a dentist to help people," says Rolfe. "I see the world as one people; it's too small of a place to continue to be isolated."

To find out more about the Afghan Dental Relief Project, visit [www.ADRPinc.org](http://www.ADRPinc.org) or e-mail [ADRP@verizon.net](mailto:ADRP@verizon.net).

