

The AOG: Humanity in Action

In Hindi, AOG means “welcome” – a fact that is reflected in the AOG’s broad membership base and positive, friendly approach. Every year the AOG is involved in many different social and charity events, including its regular Summer BBQ, and Annual Ball. The AOG also undertakes regular missions abroad.

One of the highlights of the year so far has been the AOG’s trip to Kenya, which included the option for members to extend their trip to attend a conference in Capetown, and also to visit one the AOG’s many charity projects in Tanzania.

Dr Manny Vasant MBE, is on the AOG Board of Trustees, and has just returned from the AOG trip to Kenya and Tanzania:

“I’ve been involved with the AOG since the start and have been involved in many different roles,” he says. “The trips abroad came about as we are all interested in two things – education and charity. Wherever we go we are usually doing some charity work in one form or another. During the Kenya trip for example we took some of the delegation to Tanzania where we’ve got a disability centre.

“The trip itself was excellent. Firstly, we went to Kenya where we held a conference with local dentists. We had about 80 people there in total from both the Kenya Dental Association, as well as from our own delegation, so the event was very well attended. Subjects ranged from osteoporosis to mercury poisoning, and also included an overview of basic life support – all of which was very well received.

“Following the conference we moved on to the Masai Mara game reserve, where we spent an exciting two days exploring the beautiful African landscape. In the evenings we held seminars which were designed to be useful and interesting for everyone – not just dentists – with subjects including the likes of management and team building.”

Charity is an important part of the AOG philosophy, and as well as the various educational elements to the trip, AOG delegates were determined to make the most of the opportunity to put their skills to good use helping those in need. Following the trip to the Masai Mara reserve, the tour branched, with a number of delegates moving on to Musoma in Tanzania. Here they visited the Lake Victoria Disability Centre, which the AOG is helping to move to larger premises with better facilities.

“The main purpose of our visit to Musoma was laying a foundation stone for the new centre,” says Dr Vasant. “We purchased seven acres of land and donated it to the charity, laying the foundations of what is going to be called AOG House. Eventually it’s going to be a medical and dental centre, as well as a centre for administration. There’s already a building there, but we are taking it to new premises and making it bigger with separate dormitories for boys and girls, and a disabled school as well.

“Many people don’t realise just how common disability is in Tanzania. Latest figures suggest over 1 in 10 of the population suffer from some form of disability, so for us, it’s very important that we do our little bit to try and help.

“Naturally education is a subject very close to our hearts. The new centre will run vocational training for disabled adults and young people, where we will teach practical skills such as carpentry and plumbing to help them gain important skills so they can find jobs for themselves.

“As well as laying the foundations for the new centre, we also planted a large number of trees. Everyone who was there planted a tree that will be named after them, which we will all be able to see every time we return to the centre in the future, as this is part of a long-term project that we are going to be involved with for a long time.”

Though many of the AOG’s members are dentists, or are connected to dentistry in some way, much of the work done at the Lake Victoria Disability Centre doesn’t involve dentistry at all.

“You might be surprised to learn that they actually need a very limited amount of dentistry at the LVDC,” says Dr Vasant. “Our focus with this project is more on teaching communication and practical skills – basically teaching anything at all that will help the centre’s users find a job or stay employed. This is as much about occupational therapy as anything. In the centre they manufacture all sorts of practical things such as chairs and desks that can either be used by the centre, or can be sold to raise money. Interestingly, the most important thing they manufacture is a disability vehicle – a sort of tricycle for adults that they make out of bicycle parts that the rider operates with their hands. All the parts can be obtained locally. Importantly, it is a vehicle made *by* disabled people, *for* disabled people. This really gives the local people a sense of purpose, as well as giving disabled people the freedom to move about.”

Looking back over his time in Africa, Dr Vasant is confident that the AOG’s charity projects are really making a big difference to the lives of countless people both in Africa and in various charity projects around the world. For Dr Vasant, this is what the AOG is all about.

“The main thing for me is that the AOG is very much like an extended family. It’s really about bringing people together to share in education and the great joy of doing good around the world. Humanity is a core part of the AOG philosophy. For me, I get a great satisfaction out of being able to help other people, and for many AOG members, I think they feel the same way too.

“On 21st July we’ve organised for another group to go out to Africa to do some dentistry. We have all the equipment there including a portable dental unit which we can drive anywhere. We even have extraction forceps that can be taken out into the jungle, along with the likes of torches and everything we need to work without electricity.

“One of the major issues in Africa at the moment is infant mutilation in dentistry. When people have toothache they will often go to a witchdoctor who will make a hole in the gum and take the tooth bud out. A lot of babies and young people die of septicaemia as a result, so education will be a big part of our members’ mission, with posters and programmes to explain to people why they should go to a dentist and not a witchdoctor.”

The AOG organises a great many different social and charity events throughout the year, and also offers its members a number of benefits, including discount with The Dental Directory. To find out more, contact the AOG today.

The AOG – towards the greater good.

For further details on forthcoming trips and events, or to join, visit www.aoguk.org.