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Songea District Commissioner Bertha Mende with New York-based Professor Dr. Anthony Vernillo (left) and MCW Co-founder and Executive Director Eddie Bergman during an interview at the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) Centre in Dar es Salaam. (Picture by courtesy of the American Embassy).

US group provides dental services to Songea

By Staff Reporter
THE AFRICAN

A team of 18 people from a US-based organisation - Miracle Corners of the World Inc. (MCW) - recently provided over 500 Songea residents with free dentistry services.

The organisation, founded and run primarily by youths, is a not-for-profit community development organisation, according to its co-founder and Executive Director Eddie Bergman.

A statement by the American Embassy yesterday quoted an interview with leaders of the team held at the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) Centre in Dar es Salaam on the eve of the team's departure.

Bergman and MCW Dental Co-ordinator and New York University Professor Anthony Vernillo outlined the success of the organisation's outreach programmes in Songea and Arusha regions. The Songea District Commissioner, Bertha Mende, joined them at the interview.

In Songea MCW conducted a

training workshop for youth on HIV/AIDS apart from providing free dental services to the community. The MCW dental clinic involved six MCW dentists in cooperation with Songea hospital dental staff and their supervisor, Dr. D.A. Malekela.

The MCW dental team included five dentists from US and one from South Africa. Dr. Vernillo led the dental team comprising Dr. Ron Kumbawa of Stellenbosch University, South Africa, Dr. Mitchell Pines of New York University, Abtin Shahriari of the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Frank Andolino, a private practitioner in New York, and Dr. Onir Leshem of Forsyth Dental Research Institute, Boston.

The MCW dental team introduced a new regime for treating decaying teeth in remote areas, where electricity is non-existent, by using portable equipment and without the need for anaesthesia in the process.

The procedure, known as a traumatic restorative treatment (ART), has been developed in the Netherlands.

At the same time Dr. Vernillo said that many people do not realise that good health is dependent on their teeth being in good shape.

"Taking care of your teeth is extremely important," he said. He pointed out that you can't eat well if you don't have good teeth.

Dr. Vernillo said that they had left behind ten sets of dental equipment so that the service continues after his team leaves.

During the dental outreach programme, the dentists showed the local hospital staff how to use the equipment. "The whole idea is sustainability, the process should continue where we had left off," he emphasised.

Meanwhile, Mende said the demand for dental treatment was high and the MCW volunteers worked tirelessly from morning to late evenings.

"The need for dental services to poor families showed clearly that it was badly needed," said Mende. According to Dr. Vernillo, the patient-to-dentist ratio in Tanzania is high, standing at 1.2 million people to a dentist.