Date: June 2, 2011

To: International Dental Volunteer Programs

From: Dr. Brian T. Kennedy
Chair, Council on Dental Education and Licensure

Dr. Kathryn Kell
Chair, Committee on International Programs and Development

Subject: ADA House Resolution 31H-2010

We are writing to share with you the American Dental Association’s recently-adopted policy addressing students’ participation in dental outreach programs. The policy statement was first proposed by the American Student Dental Association and the Pennsylvania Dental Association last fall. The 2010 House of Delegates supported the concept and adopted Resolution 31H-2010: Participation in Dental Outreach Programs:

Resolved, that it be policy of the American Dental Association (ADA) that students in U.S. dental schools and pre-dental programs who participate in a dental outreach program (e.g., international service trips, domestic service trips, volunteerism in underserved areas, etc.) be strongly encouraged:

- To adhere to the ASDA Student Code of Ethics and the ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct;
- To be directly supervised by dentists licensed to practice or teach in the United States;
- To perform only procedures for which the volunteer has received proper education and training.

The dedication of the growing number of volunteers who work in some of the world’s most deprived communities is fully supported by the American Dental Association. However, we have experienced a sense of increasing unease that some volunteers, albeit with good intentions, may be inadequately supervised or may perform procedures without receiving sufficient training or education to ensure that no harm is done to patients.

Resolution 31H-2010 addresses that apprehension. The policy speaks to the profession’s concern for the growing number of dental and pre-dental students and others who participate in dental outreach programs and perform irreversible operative procedures,
administering anesthesia and extracting teeth without adequate education and training. In some cases, these outreach programs do not have the resources to provide the participants with adequate supervision by qualified individuals. If training is offered, it is often provided on-site immediately prior to treatment, failing to give inexperienced students sufficient preparation time and adequate instruction concerning the technique involved and how to anticipate and avoid potential complications that might arise during the course of the procedure.

Recognizing that your organization has a vested interest in the public’s oral health and plays a role in dental outreach programs, we hope that you will give the ADA’s new policy serious consideration. Help us to ensure the well-being of all patients while instilling in our students/health professionals that they have an ethical duty to protect patients, including vulnerable populations, by practicing within the limits of their training and expertise.


The ADA Division of Global Affairs offers international volunteer resources and a directory of international volunteer programs on the ADA International Volunteer webpage http://internationalvolunteer.ada.org. A volunteer toolkit is also available from Health Volunteers Overseas, a U.S. non-profit organization whose Oral Health Initiative is sponsored by the ADA. http://www.hvousa.org/volunteerToolkit/index.shtml.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

BTK/KK:ljh

cc: Dr. Richard Valachovic, executive director, American Dental Education Association
Ms. Nancy Honeycutt, executive director, American Student Dental Association