

Jim Estill, a GDP from Kirriemuir, describes his three visits to Peru to do dental voluntary work in a shanty town outside Lima

## From Kirriemuir to Collique ... and back again

I made my first visit to Collique, a shanty town on the outskirts of Lima, in October 2004. A few months beforehand a GMP from Kirriemuir asked if I was interested in doing some voluntary work in Peru. His brother-in-law, Luis Campos, is a Peruvian living and working as a cardiologist in Houston, Texas. Luis had previously established missions in deprived areas of Lima where medics and allied professions treated people who otherwise would or could not access medical or dental treatment.

The voluntary work is co-ordinated through a charity called OSA (Operación San Andrés). My trip to Collique was humbling and rewarding, and I've now been three times, most recently in April 2007. This article describes some of the dental and personal experiences of my three trips, and may inspire some other dental professionals to do voluntary work abroad! The three sections describe my visits in October 2004, May 2006 and April 2007.

### Collique – a rude awakening

It's 7.30 in the morning and I'm looking out of the window of a bus travelling through a

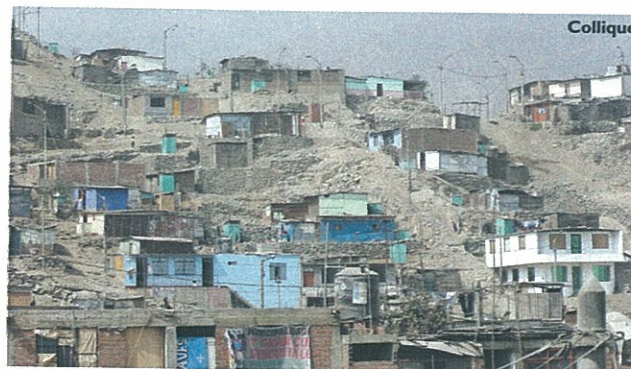
deprived area of Lima. There are about 20 Americans on board, plus a couple of Scots, and we are listening to our Peruvian bus driver sing operatic arias in a very passable fashion.

We're here because staff at the charity OSA have identified a shanty town called Collique as being particularly in need of medical support. Having done dental voluntary work a few years previously in India, I jumped at the chance to go to an area of the world I had never been to before.

Our group consists of four doctors (cardiologist, GP, paediatrician and infectious diseases), two final year medical students, two dentists, two hygienists, plus six nurses and some other volunteers.

We all met up at Houston airport and were each allocated a locker containing medical equipment, clothes and gifts (each locker weighed 70 pounds), plus one carry-on piece of luggage, also containing equipment. We were only allowed one case for our own clothes.

Having arrived in Lima and cleared customs (where we had to pay a \$450 bribe to bring our legitimate medical equipment in!), we finally got to our hotel



around 5 a.m. The new arrivals spent the following day exploring Lima, while the old hands set up the clinic in Collique.

On Monday morning the bus departed for Collique loaded like a packhorse and serenaded by the Peruvian equivalent of Pavarotti. Although I've been to some very inhospitable places in my time, Collique took a bit of beating. Unlike Europe, where the wealthy live on hillsides to enjoy the views and escape the heat, the very opposite is true here. Nothing grows and there is brown earth everywhere. Water for the shacks was delivered by bowser and emptied into tanks.

The building we were using as a clinic was divided into cubicles using draped sheets to maintain a semblance of privacy. West Ficken (a dentist from the US) and I occupied a very small room into which we squeezed a table and two loungers (which served as dental chairs). We didn't have any electricity so used battery powered Petzl headlamps for illumination. Obviously conditions were not ideal for cross-infection control, but with the use of MikroZid wipes, plus a very strong solution of Septodont cold sterilising solution, we did the best we could. The two hygienists set up in another part of the building.

During the week we saw around 550 patients and carried out 150 extractions, 230 scalings and 125 fillings (I had brought Fuji II, Chemfil and an LED curing light). Having had to mix everything myself I'll never criticise my nurse for mixing errors again! We laughed our way through the week, and along with the hygienists worked like Trojans. While we were there we gave away over a thousand toothbrushes.

My dental low spot came with the second patient of the week,

when I fractured the crown off an upper 6 and could not budge the roots so had to leave them. Great start! The high spot was taking out a horizontal upper 3 in an otherwise very attractive 16 year old girl, which improved her appearance no end. As in India there were huge amounts of caries, but I only saw three buccal sinuses and not a lot of pain. There were roots but with remineralised hard dentine. I had to admit that all this made me question what good, if any, we were doing, as nature seemed to be coping not badly itself.

We left Collique tired but rewarded by the reaction we had received. The following week five of us flew to Cusco, where we enjoyed some truly spectacular scenery while acclimatising to the 11,000 foot altitude. We also visited Machu Picchu, a must-see location.

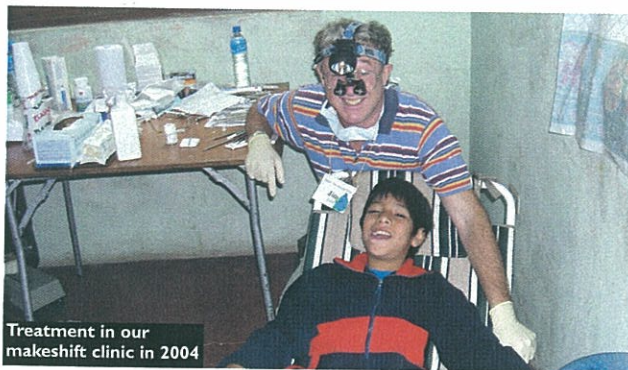
I was determined to return to Collique, but made a resolution to take some battery-powered or portable air-driven handpieces so I could do some more early conservative treatment next time.

### Nataly's mountain

"God, this is a hard place!". We were gathered in Collique's community centre, and I could only agree with the words of one of the volunteers – a lawyer called Keith. Eighteen months had passed since my first visit, and the place was even more barren than I remembered it.

Over the following week our group of 14 volunteers provided much needed dental care and spiritual support to the people of Collique. The dental volunteers included myself, West and two hygienists from Houston, Becca Wilburn and Bobbie-Ann Rasco, all of whom had worked together during my first visit.

Since then OSA had pur-



Treatment in our makeshift clinic in 2004

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