

Chapter 4

PROVIDERS OF PORTABLE DENTAL CARE

The military has been involved in mobile dental care since horse and buggy days. They needed dentists for troops on battlefields in remote locations to alleviate the pain of bad teeth. It was necessary for these dentists to carry their equipment with them, such as it was. This was usually a black bag with a limited number of extraction instruments.

In today's world the modern dentist can no longer carry all of his essentials in a black bag. Dentistry has gone through a number of revolutionary advances to expand the profession into a highly sophisticated health delivery profession. New materials, precision equipment, better techniques and high educational standards have revolutionized dentistry, as we know it today.

These revolutionary changes have placed a tremendous burden on carrying the complete dental office from location to location. It is not possible for the military to pack the average dental office in thirty minutes notice and "move out" to a new position. Total dental care has to be delivered in a secure rear position, and only emergency type care is delivered in a forward area near the battle zone.

Due to this transportation problem, the military has conducted constant research and development seeking new ideas and designs for making the dental office truly portable. But, as in many other such projects, the military has different standards and specifications for each branch of service. The Navy, Army and Air Force each want the equipment made to their specifications. For instance, the Army wants equipment rugged enough to withstand a parachute drop from the air, or the Navy needs equipment resistant to corrosive elements such as salt water. A huge resource for dental equipment and materials evaluation is found at decs.nhgl.med.navy.mil updated August 2007. It's worth a look!

Each branch of the military has a dental corps with its own particular mode of operation. Military research has developed a multitude of concepts for portable dentistry. Many valuable contributions have come from these designs and prototypes. Designing dental equipment for portable use sounds simple, but in reality it poses great problems. They include collapsibility, weight, strength, durability, practicality, usability, and versatility.

The **American Red Cross** www.redcross.org has a great interest in portable dental equipment for disaster areas. They must be able to give immediate, comprehensive on-site medical attention within hours. They also need this new technology to provide impoverished areas in developing nations with medical assistance in times of emergency.

The World Health Organization Headquarters Office (WHO) is located in Geneva, Switzerland. Their mailing address is: Avenue Appala 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. They are concerned with teaching developing countries to help themselves. WHO is striving to train natives to perform basic dental procedures and provide their own population with good dental health education? Local workers are also being taught to build items for portable dental use, such as simple dental stools and chairs. With these items in their schools, the trained natives can educate the children and involve them in dental preventive education. Refer to website www.who.int/en. See WHO's information about the World Dental Federation www.fdiworldental.org/home/home.html 2007 Action Plan.

A number of dental schools such as Iowa, Michigan, Louisville and Loma Linda have utilized portable and mobile dental care to the needy. They developed programs using dental students for externship to areas of need in their communities. Those programs proved to be quite effective because they concentrated on preventive procedures and education of the children. The drawbacks to the programs were that they were time consuming and costly. In the past, most of the programs utilized mobile vans or trailers to house their equipment and move from location to location. Now, programs lean toward portable equipment to contain cost and give them much greater versatility and latitude of service to their patients. A good resource is the ADA "Manual on Dental Care Access Programs" available through the ADA.

Church denominations and charitable organizations who recognize the dental needs at home and abroad have been active with portable dental equipment for many years. The American Dental Association has a publication called ***International Dental Volunteer Organizations: A Guide to Service and a Directory of Programs*** (refer to page 16), which lists a host of dental health providers. Other information is also available through the ADA Library Service about Portable Dentistry. Refer to page 42.

As you can well imagine, this segment of providers stretches across the whole spectrum of dental needs in the world. Dentistry is needed everywhere, whether in your hometown or the most remote mission station of the world. Dental disease affects more than 95% of the world's population. That makes it easily the number one disease in our world, but it does not have the highest priority. This new generation of portable dental equipment has the versatility to go into every man's world and bring relief from pain and suffering.

Also, a list of organizations with hundreds of trip opportunities is available on our website at www.worlddentalrelief.com/tripopportunities.html.

HealthCare Ministries **SHORT-TERM TRIPS MANUAL**

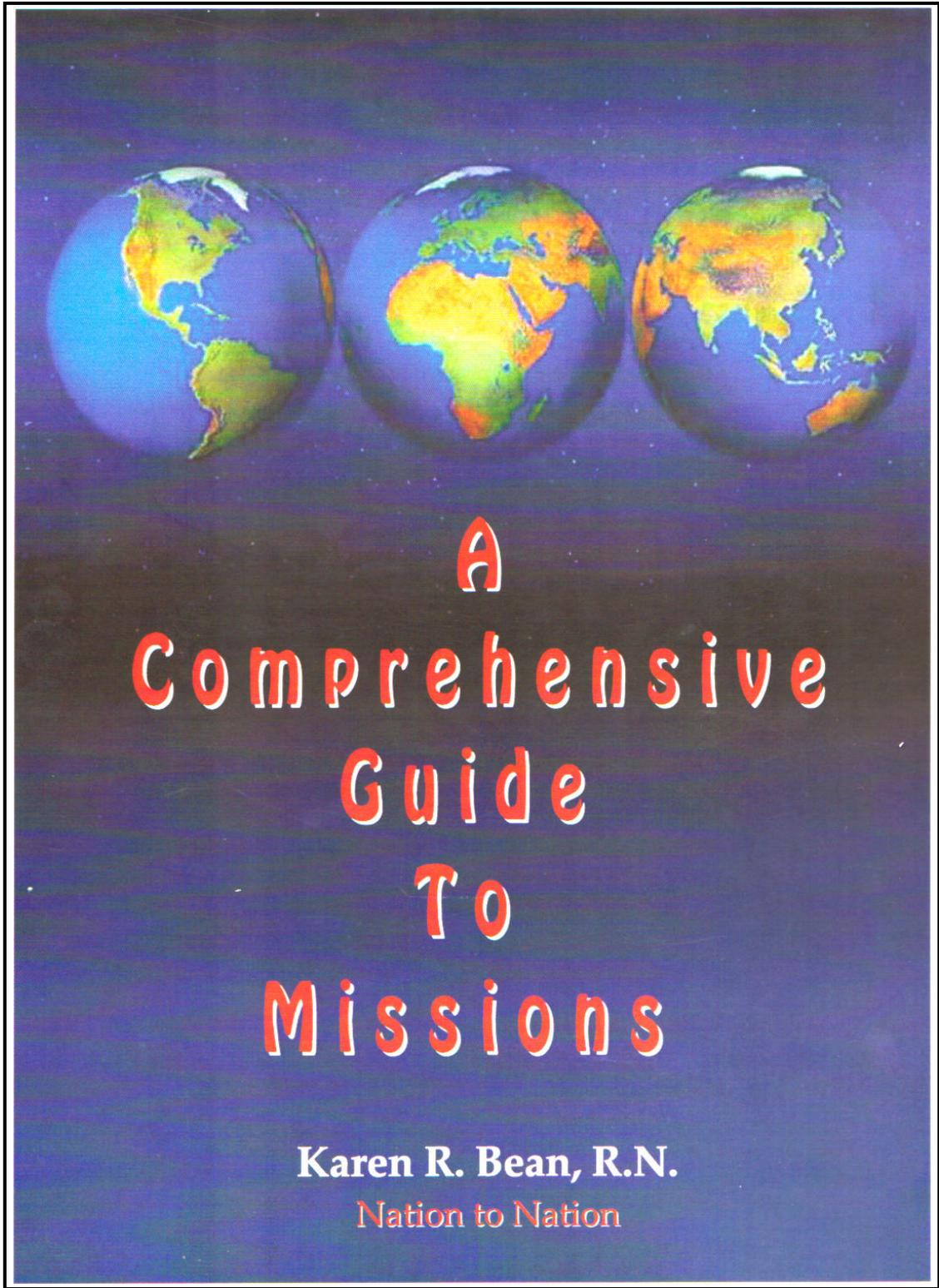


A Guide to Medical Mission Trips

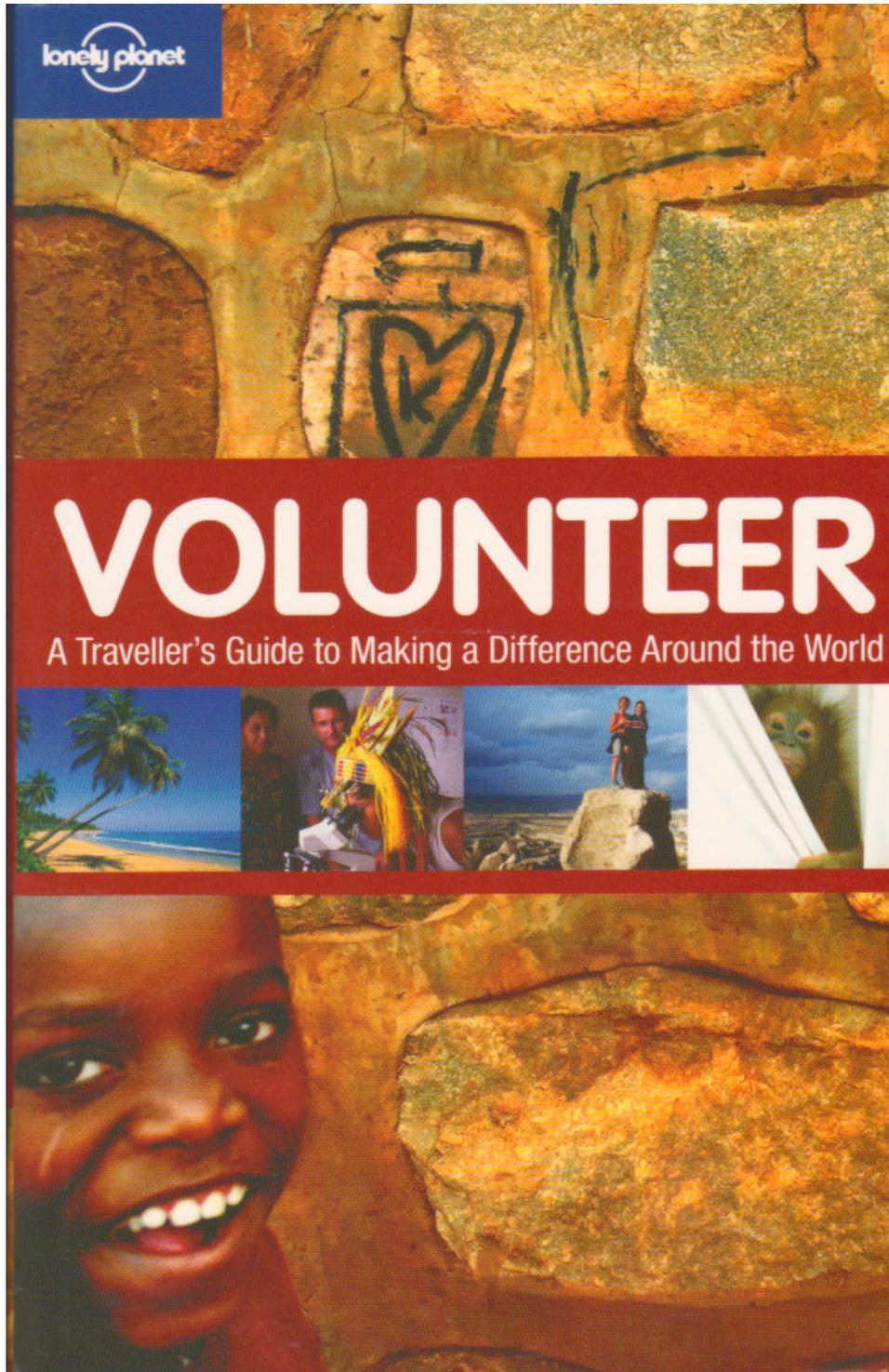
Peggy Johnson
Editor

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS

The new "A Guide to Medical Mission Trips" by Peggy Johnson is a very good manual on how to plan, pack and go on medical/dental mission trips. Available for \$25 at www.healthcareministries.org



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