Headwaters Dental provides free dental care for a day]

Written By **Brian Lockhart**

For many people struggling to pay the bills, receiving dental care may be something that they just can't afford or have to put off to pay for something else.

At Headwaters Dental in Orangeville, Dr. Raj Khanuja, was so moved by one of his patients, that he decided to make a day available for free dental care for anyone who needs it.

Around 10 years ago, one of his patients had some cavities that needed to be taken care of. The patient opted to not return to complete the procedure. The next time he saw her, when she brought her son in, he asked the patient why she didn't want the cavities repaired.

She explained that as a single mother, she had limited funds, and as her son was playing hockey, she decided to spend what little money she had on buying him hockey equipment rather than taking care of her own health.

?She said something that really touched my heart,? Dr. Raj explained. ?She said she had been trying to buy some hockey equipment for her son, and she had a choice between hockey equipment or her teeth. That really stuck with me. I have many colleagues that go abroad, like those working with Beyond Borders, helping in developing nations that do good work, so it occurred to me that there are people here that need help. Instead of going abroad and helping people, I'd decided to stay in my own backyard. I told the patient to come in and book an appointment and she will be the first patient for the free dental day. And that's how it got started.?

Dr. Raj has expanded the free dental day to all of his eight clinics located in southern Ontario meaning he is offering eight days of care for patients in those areas. Free procedures offered include cleaning, white fillings, and simple extractions.

The free clinic took place in Orangeville on Tuesday, Dec. 6.

?We started the program at one clinic, then expanded to four, and now this year we are doing all eight clinics,? Dr. Raj explained. ?We are doing Orangeville today, this is our second one. We did it in Brampton in November, and the next one is coming up in Hillsburgh.?

Dr. Raj's philosophy regarding those that request free dental care is to assume those requesting it, need it.

?Whoever comes in ? we don't ask questions,? he explained. ?Generally it's people who don't have insurance. We take care of people on this day. We're not here to ask them questions or screen them to see if they can afford it or if they have coverage. It is their choice ? they are choosing to be here, and we are here to provide a service. It's a way of helping people in my community. It is a feeling of satisfaction to do this. It makes you feel wonderful that you are able to help someone. Some of the people we see, you can really tell they were in need of our services. Any difference we can make, even if it's one person at a time, it's worth it.?

At the end of the day, the clinic provided $15,011 worth of dental services for free. Many patients left heartwarming messages for Dr. Raj and his staff for their compassionate work.

Dr. Raj is a busy man as he moves around between his eight clinics, and he has decided to give back to the members of the communities that support him, by offering this service every year to those who otherwise may go without any dental care at all.