

Dr David Rosenwax: Order of Australia honours achievements

Dr David Rosenwax is not the kind of man to rest on his laurels.

As if four children and nine grandchildren weren't enough to keep the nominally retired dentist busy, he's also intent on making a difference, which might explain why he's recently been awarded the Order of Australia.

"I'm rather excited about it all, but one doesn't do things to get an award, although it's nice to be recognised. The best part was that my family all got very excited."

He has long been associated with committees of the Federal and NSW Branches of the Australian Society of Implant Dentistry, being one of the early practitioners to introduce dental implants from the US in the early 1980s, and if that's not enough, he is also president of the Jewish Centre On Aging. In 2006, he oversaw the delivery of over 40,000 meals to elderly members of the Jewish community.

But now he has a new project: Filling the Gap, an initiative aimed at giving dental care to over 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Cairns area.

Until recently, the indigenous communities around Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands were a dental black hole, where in 2005 the waiting list for the most basic care was over a year. So bad was the situation that even the most minor conditions often developed into chronic pain, with only one local dentist treating patients only one day a week.

"I felt that doing something like this was really giving something back. This is something I really believe in."

Indeed, you get the feeling from his animated hand movements that David Rosenwax is not the sort of man to retire; there is always something he will feel passionate about.

And slowly but surely he's attempting to do something about it: in its 18 months, Filling The Gap has managed to arrange for 34 dentists to volunteer their time to go to Cairns, treating over 1,700 patients. Not bad for a private organisation with no government support.

Dr Rosenwax shrugs. "It's my job to recruit dentists in Sydney and Melbourne, to convince them to volunteer for one or two weeks and go to Cairns, to raise the airfares. Once they get there, everything is provided. That was the real tragedy of the place, Wuchopperen [the Indigenous Health Service that operates in the Cairns region] had two brand new, fully equipped dental rooms in the clinic in Cairns, as well as a mobile dental



van for work in outlying communities, there was just no one to use them.

"The response from dentists to the program has been incredible, but we always need more volunteers," Dr Rosenwax says, before proudly mentioning that Filling The Gap has even been singled out by the Government's Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report as one of the 'Things That Work', 'a real complement to ourselves as well as all the people at Wuchopperen who keep Filling The Gap running.'

So what's next for David Rosenwax?

"Well, at the moment I'm trying to recruit a few dentists for the Christmas/New Year period. Accommodation is paid for by Wuchopperen Health Service and airfares are all covered by Filling the Gap, and best of all it is a rewarding experience for everyone." ♦

Filling The Gap is looking for more dentists to volunteer for 1-2 weeks. For more information, visit www.fillingthegap.com.au or ring Uri Windt on 0418 208 755

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