

Adventist Dental Clinic, Bangladesh

FRANK ARTAVIA

Dr. Frank Artavia was born in Costa Rica and is a songwriter, singer, and dentist, who has placed his gifts at the service of God. He enjoys cooking, traveling, and preaching, beside his wife Dayana. He served as director of the Costa Rican Adventist Medical Center, Health Ministries director of the Costa Rica South Central Conference, and singing evangelist in several countries. Since October 2017, he has been director of the Adventist Dental Clinic in Bangladesh.

The first record of the establishment of the Adventist Dental Clinic in Bangladesh indicated that future medical plans included launching the clinic in Dacca during 1973. It was understood that Bangladesh was in great need, and it was the Adventists' desire to do everything they could to help build the country. They desired "to forget those things which are behind and to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."¹

Immediately after the country achieved independence, the Bangladesh Section opened a dental clinic in Dhaka, with the goal of catering to diplomats living in Dhaka City.² The reasons for establishing a dental clinic included reaching the elite class of people, becoming known as an organization, and generating income for the advancement of the work in Bangladesh.³

Founding

Dr. Maynard F. Aaby donated his office equipment and dental lab to the new clinic in Dacca, Bangladesh. The Aabys arrived in Dacca on October 9, 1973, and returned home on December 1. Prior to establishment of the clinic, people had to fly to Bangkok or the United States for a dental crown or bridge.⁴

The Bangladesh department of health and department of relief granted duty free clearance to the dental equipment. The dental clinic was located in a house at 70 Gulshan Avenue, Dacca, a prominent location of the city, and was remodeled by the government.⁵

The Adventist Dental Clinic was the finest dental facility in the country. In spite of the press of activity, Dr. Maynard Aaby and H. Yeoman (lab technician) accepted patients.⁶ In ten weeks these two families not only set up, but donated, equipment to give Adventists the most modern dental clinic in Bangladesh.⁷ On one occasion the wife of the German Ambassador had a tooth drilled while carpenters pounded noisily a few feet away.⁸ No patients were turned away although appointments for major care were booked for the new year.⁹

On October 24, 1973, Wayne A. Morris and his family left their country accepting the call, to serve as dental technician.¹⁰ After spending several months in Nigeria, Dr. Cornell A. Sabo and his wife, though officially retired,¹¹ arrived on January 9 to assist in the Dacca Dental Clinic for four months.¹²

History

The Adventist Dental Clinic was somewhat unstable during the first half of 1974. But on August 25, Dr. Walter Hadley arrived and the image of the clinic was greatly improved. It appeared to be capable of self-support.¹³

When Walter Hadley and his wife arrived from the United States to take charge of the Dacca Dental Clinic, it took only two weeks to report that they were booked well ahead with patients. The Hadleys also began to study the language.¹⁴ The dental clinic in Dacca, under the direction of Dr. Walter Hadley, was off to a successful start.¹⁵

The dental clinic at Gulshan was also busy. Every Thursday afternoon, Dr. Hadley went to Dattapara for charity work, where he saw an average of 15 people. Wayne Morris, the lab technician, specialized in making false teeth, crowns, and bridges. Also on the staff was Mrs. Isaac Bairagee, a trained nurse. Mrs. Morris was the bookkeeper and receptionist. Thomas Dulu Roy was learning to be a lab apprentice.¹⁶

On July 28, 1976, Jon E. Pitts and his family left Seattle, Washington, so he could serve as a dentist in Bangladesh.¹⁷ Leaving a well-established practice and going to a mission field like Bangladesh is a beautiful example of a family committing themselves completely to the Lord and being willing to go wherever He might call. There were sacrifices involved in this mission experience.¹⁸

By the second half of 1977 the Adventist Dental Clinic in Dacca was remodeled and was able to accommodate four chairs. Dr. and Mrs. Walter Hadley returned to the United States, and they were replaced by Dr. and Mrs. David Johnson.¹⁹ On June 10, 1979, Joel Wesley Geisinger left New York City, to serve as dental laboratory technician.²⁰

The Adventist Dental Clinic was a shining light for the Adventist Church among the elite of Dacca, foreign diplomats and government officials, and also among the needy. The clinic provided more than 4.5 lakh takas in charity services during that time. It was not only 100 percent self-supporting, but also provided more than 2.5 lakh takas for the following projects: the purchase of a Toyota HiAce bus, repairing and rebuilding staff housing at Gopalganj Adventist Hospital, construction of a principal's house at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary, and buying needed medicines for Gopalganj Adventist Hospital.²¹

The Adventist Dental Clinic in Dacca operated on a self-supporting basis and met a class of people not usually contacted by the Adventist message.²² Bangladesh also ran a 25-bed rural hospital and the dental clinic in the capital city of Dacca, where two expatriate dentists served.²³

From 1978 to 1983 the Adventist Dental Clinic, expanded to include seven functioning operatories, laboratory facilities, and 19 employees—including laboratory technicians, clinical trainees, expanded-duties assistants, hygienists, bookkeepers, and receptionists. Several of the assistants were registered nurses, and most of those doing clinical work were trained to give injections, do extractions, clean teeth, and give oral hygiene instructions and simple nutritional information. Doctors Jon Pitts and David Johnson led the program.²⁴

Every week a team visited Bangladesh Adventist Academy in Goalbathan, about 35 miles from Dhaka. Facilities were constructed there so free dental care could be offered to the villagers in the surrounding area. The clinic became so popular that numbers had to be handed out as the people arrived—sometimes several hours before the dental team arrived.²⁵

A satellite dental clinic was opened at the Adventist hospital in Gopalganj, staffed by Nalini Bayen, the clinic's first graduate.²⁶

In March 1982, Tamara Sleeter, a 1978 medical graduate of Loma Linda University, arrived to fill a longstanding call for a physician to establish a medical office in conjunction with the dental clinic in Dhaka. Dr. Sleeter's specialty was obstetrics-gynecology, but she quickly became an expert in family care and tropical medicine. Prior to her arrival, most expatriates felt it necessary to leave the country to have medical problems attended to, so Dr. Sleeter was warmly welcomed by the large expatriate community.²⁷

The medical clinic, like the dental clinic, was open to all—from ambassadors to beggars. In addition to her duties in Dhaka, Dr. Sleeter accompanied the dental team to the village clinic at Goalbathan, where she saw medical patients.²⁸

Dr. David Johnson selected those with fine motor skills and inquired if they liked to paint and draw. He started to train these people as lab technicians. He then asked Nalini Bayen, "Do you want to work inside the patient's mouth or outside of the mouth?" Nalini replied, "In the patient's mouth;" and Dr. Johnson said, "I am going to train you as a dentist."²⁹

On December 28, 1984, Charles Ray Bowman left Los Angeles in route to Bangladesh, to serve as a dental technician.³⁰

Each year the union conducted an Ingathering program in Chittagong, and from January 21 to 31, 1985, they also included a free tooth extraction at three locations. While the dental team, headed by Dr. David Johnson, busily pulled teeth, five uplift teams were actively contacting the businesses for their annual contribution. The dental team saw as many as 120 patients in a day. At the end of two weeks the dental team saw 1,000 patients and the uplift teams worked with the tremendous help of Elder Lowell C. Cooper from the division.³¹

There were plans underway to establish a permanent Adventist Dental Clinic in Chittagong by August 1985.³²

The training program was developed to provide education to young people with the intention of opening more satellite clinics around the country. It was a life-changing program, which helped the people to improve their education, lifestyle, and dignity by becoming self-sustainable and being able to support the church. The team of people was willing to work, willing to learn, and willing to follow instructions.³³

By that time Dacca, Bangladesh, had a four-year dental training program for national young people. Two graduates who received recognition by the Bangladesh government operated dental clinics in remote areas of the country, doing a splendid work.³⁴

Dr. Johnson educated and trained six young men in dentistry: Dr. Nalini Bayen, Dr. Ronald Halder, Dr. Gilbert Halder, Dr. Sonaton Murmu, Dr. Senford Sarker, and Dr. Timothy Adhikary, and he also trained several dental nurses. Among the laboratory technicians trained by Dr. Johnson and Charles Bowman were Monohem Boraya, Amor Mridha, Badol Halder, Sandra Chisim, Prodip Ballove, Moses Baidya, and many others.³⁵

In the mid-1980s, ADC established dental clinics in Chittagong, Sylhet, Gopalganj, KMMS, and BASC. These dental clinics were run by local dentists. Most of the dental clinics set up outside of Dhaka City were short lived.³⁶

In the 1990s, relief agency personnel brought cyclone relief efforts to Bangladesh during May and June. A survey team, consisting of Dr. Lisa Prusak, ADRA medical consultant; Mahmoud Gaznabi, ADRA field officer; and Dr. Glenn Hughes, dentist from the Dhaka Adventist Dental Clinic, worked on locating areas of need that the anticipated budget could handle. The distribution of food cards allowed orderly distribution from the first trucks carrying more than 12 tons of prepackaged, ready-to-eat food on May 11.³⁷ Dr. Glenn Hughes spent two years as director of the Adventist dental clinic in Dhaka, Bangladesh.³⁸

On July 22 Charlie Parasram Wailu Odaiyar left Loma Linda, California, to serve as dentist at the Adventist Dental Clinic, and he later became the director.³⁹ After Dr. Odaiyar's departure, an Australian doctor replaced him, Dr. Emanuel Oczko. He served as director from 1994 to 1996. Working with him was a newly graduated Argentinean dentist, Dr. Gerardo Toledo, who served as dentist from 1994 to 1996 and director from 1996 to 1998.⁴⁰

During Dr. Gerardo Toledo's leadership, a low-cost clinic was opened in Mirpur with the intention of helping the community. The idea was to have affordable prices for the people living in the Mirpur area.⁴¹

The Adventist Dental Clinic in Dhaka operated for more than 20 years and had a very successful outreach. Regular patients included embassy personnel from around the world, local Bengalis, and government workers.⁴²

Dr. Gerardo Toledo passed the responsibility of leading ADC to Dr. James Trott. Dr. Trott was able to establish a good relationship with the US Embassy and supplies were shipped from the United States to the embassy. Dr. Trott was only at the clinic for one year and his place was taken by the second doctor in the clinic, Dr. Milan Moskala.⁴³ Dr. Moskala led ADC from 1999 to 2015.

After DMD graduation, Lorna Biswas started her career at ADC Mirpur and was there from April 2003 to March 2005. When her contract ended, she proceeded with further studies.⁴⁴

Since ADC was operating in a rented building, the clinic kept moving from one place to another within Gulshan area. Then, in 2010, it was moved to Baridhara, in the diplomatic enclave in Dhaka City.⁴⁵ This was initially on a temporary basis, until the clinic could be set up in a new location; however, the clinic remained there for ten years.⁴⁶

Historical Role

With financial assistance from the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD) and some other donors, the organization purchased a space of approximately 1,100 square feet in the Jamuna Future Park shopping mall and set up a modern facility for the Adventist Dental Clinic. The clinic was inaugurated on August 3, 2016, while the German, Dr. Hans Wolff, was director. The clinic operated simultaneously with the branch in Baridhara, since the new location was not totally accessible to the regular patients.⁴⁷

October 12, 2017, Dr. Frank Artavia left Costa Rica to serve as director of the clinic. Since then, he and his wife, Dayana, have been operating the ADC.⁴⁸ In 2018 the clinic started offering the service of Implants, Orthodontics, and Temporo- Mandibular Joint disorders.⁴⁹

In March 2019, with the financial support of the Urban Center of Influence project from SSD, the Mirpur branch was reopened, following its original premises for operation: to reach the community with affordable prices and, as part of the UCI program, to also do missionary work.⁵⁰

In June 2019 the clinic shifted 100 percent of its operations from Baridhara to the Jamuna Future Park location, and in December it celebrated its 45th anniversary. In attendance were some of the previous workers, patients, and the clinic board, along with the founder, Dr. Walter Hadley, and the director of GC Dental Affairs, Dr. Doyle Nick.⁵¹

The Adventist Dental Clinic has been producing smiles since 1974 in the tristate commercial area of Bangladesh (Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara) and beyond Dhaka. Patients used to travel long distances for dental care.⁵² One of the patients, Dr. Sultana Khanum, while she was working for the World Health Organization, used to travel from Delhi to Dhaka mainly to get dental treatment from ADC.⁵³

Outlook

In 2020, due to trade license renovation, the legal name of the clinic was changed to “Adventist Dental Care;” however, the clinic is still called “Adventist Dental Clinic.”⁵⁴

There are plans to again establish a branch in the tristate area (Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara) and in Chittagong. This would enable the VIP patients to be treated close to their homes. The clinic has started partnering with insurance companies, which opens a new window of opportunity to provide services to more institutions.⁵⁵

Entrepreneurs, ambassadors, movie stars, government officials, and many others have been treated at the Adventist Dental Clinic. Nearly 50 years have passed, and Bangladesh is not the same place as before. The economy has been increasing rapidly and there are growing opportunities. The Adventist Dental Clinic was previously the first choice for people to get high quality dental service; however, it is not alone anymore. There is opportunity to continue to provide excellent service, quality treatments, and to fulfill the ADC mission by guiding patients in how to live a healthy, happy, and prosperous life in all physical, social, mental, and spiritual aspects.⁵⁶

Nearly 50 dentists from around the globe have been part of the Adventist Dental Clinic since 1973. Below is the list of directors and some dentists who served at the Adventist Dental Clinic in Bangladesh.

Directors and Clinic Addresses

Year	Director/Dentist	Clinic Address
1973	Maynard Aaby (Set up the clinic and volunteered as dentist for the first weeks) ⁵⁷	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dacca
1974	Cornell Sabo (dentist) ⁵⁸	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dacca
1974-1977	Walter Hadley (director)	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dacca
1978-1986	Jon E. Pitts (director) David L. Johnson (dentist)	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dacca 16
1987	Jon Pitts (director) David L. Johnson (dentist)	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 16
	Nalini Bayen (director)	Zakirhossein Road, Kulshi, House No. 18, Road 4, Chittagong, Bangladesh
1988	David L. Johnson (director)	70 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka12, Bangladesh
	Nalini Bayen (director)	House No. 18, Road 4, Kulshi Hill, Chittagong
	Senford Sircar (dentist)	5 Housing Estate, Ambor Khana, Sylhet
1989	Timothy Adhikary, Senford Sircar (dentists)	House No. 18, Road 4, Kulshi Hill, Chittagong
	R. B. William (administrator)	House No. 20, Road No. 99, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1990	Glenn Hughes (director)	House No. 20, Road No. 99, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1991	Senford Sircar (dentist/director)	House No. 18, Road 4, Kulshi Hill, Chittagong
	Glenn Hughes (director) Ronald Halder (dentist)	House No. 20, Road No. 99, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1992	Gilbert T. Halder (director)	House No. 18, Road 4, Kulshi Hill, Chittagong
	Ronald Halder (director)	House No. 20, Road 99, 2nd DIT, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1993	Charles Odaiyar (director)	House No. 18, Road, 4, Kulshi Hill, Chittagong
	Charles Odaiyar (director)	House No. 20, Road 99, 2 nd DIT, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1994 ⁵⁹	Emmanuel Oczko (director) Gerardo Toledo (dentist)	House No. 20, Road 99, 2 nd DIT, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212

Year	Director/Dentist	Clinic Address
1995 ⁶⁰	Emmanuel Oczko (director) Gerardo Toledo (dentist)	78 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1996-1998 ⁶¹	Gerardo Toledo (director)	78 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
1998-1999	James Trott (director) Milan Moskala (dentist) John E Roy (dentist)	78 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212 149 Shah Ali Bagh, Mirpur-1, Dhaka-1216
2000-2004	Milan Moskala (director)	78 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
2003-2005	Lorna Biswas (dentist)	149 Shah Ali Bagh, Mirpur-1, Dhaka-1216
2005-2010	Milan Moskala (director)	Road No. 94; Plot No. CEN (A)-34, Gulshan 2; Dhaka 1212
2011-2015	Milan Moskala (director)	Road No. 4, House No. 2, Unit-C, Baridhara; Dhaka
2015-2016	Hans-Joerg Wolff (director) Edison B. Falia (dentist) Joyjoy G. Falia (dentist)	Road No. 4, House No. 2, Unit-C, Baridhara, Dhaka Jamuna Future Park, West Court, Level 4.
2017	Edison B. Falia (acting director/dentist)	Road No. 4, House No. 2, Unit-C, Baridhara, Dhaka Jamuna Future Park, West Court, Level 4.
2017-2019	Frank Artavia (director/dentist) Lorna Biswas (orthodontist) Edison Falia (dentist)	Road No. 4, House No. 2, Unit-C, Baridhara; Dhaka Jamuna Future Park, West Court, Level 4.
2019-2021	Frank Artavia (director/dentist) Lorna Biswas (orthodontist) Edison Falia (dentist)	Jamuna Future Park, West Court, Level 4.
2019-present	Frank Artavia (director) Edison Falia (dentist) Malvin Halder (dentist)	149 Shah Ali Bagh, Mirpur-1, Dhaka-1216

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