

Tackling Tooth Decay South of the Border

BU students, profs offer free dental care in Mexico

“Cierres la boca,” says Alexandra Antonescu, instructing a pediatric patient to close his mouth around a suction tube.

That’s one of the frequently used Spanish phrases that Antonescu (SDM’11) learned from a cheat-sheet taped to a wall in the St. Pierre dental clinic in Teacapan, Mexico, where in February a team of students and faculty from BU’s Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine provided free dental exams, sealants, and fillings to children ages 3 to 17.

“Coming here was a culture shock,” says fourth-year dental student Antonescu, who works mainly with adults back in Boston. “I didn’t know much Spanish, and you need to talk them through procedures. It was hard, but toward the end of the

week I got a lot more comfortable.”

Venezuela native Jennifer Soncini, an SDM clinical assistant professor, steps in for Antonescu when necessary. “Even if she uses a wrong word, the kids still understand,” says Soncini (SDM’02), who has practiced pediat-

ric dentistry for more than 25 years. “Language is not a barrier. If you smile, kids know you’re happy.”

For this mission, SDM partnered with Project Stretch, a Natick, Mass.-based nonprofit that since 1988 has provided free care for more than 20,000 children worldwide. The group visits Teacapan, on Mexico’s west coast, for three weeks each spring.

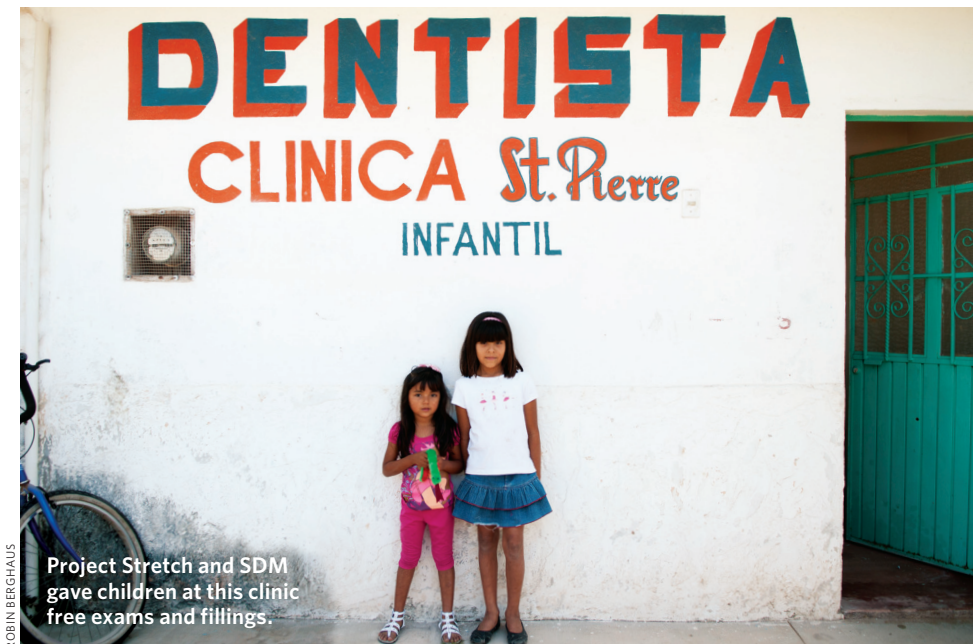
“They don’t get dental care until we arrive,” says Kathleen Held, an SDM assistant professor and the school’s assistant director of extramural programs. “When children have abscesses, doctors place them on antibiotics. They learn to live in pain.”

Daily wages for the farmers and fishermen of the town run from \$5 to \$40 a day, and a single tooth extraction can cost as much as a week’s pay. Even

if care were affordable, it’s rarely available: the closest real dental clinic is 25 miles away. Project Stretch volunteer Brenda Irvin says many families can’t afford even the bus fare, let alone the cost of dental care.

Project Stretch partners with Amigos de Teacapan, a group of Mexicans and Canadian and U.S. expatriates who host dental teams in their homes and run the clinic. They transport kids from schools, teach them how to brush and floss, and manage medical files.

“We need more young dentists excited about these missions,” says Frank Schiano (CAS’01, SDM’06,’07), an SDM clinical assistant professor. “It inspires them to get involved in community health abroad and back here in Boston.” **ROBIN BERGHAUS**



Project Stretch and SDM gave children at this clinic free exams and fillings.

ROBIN BERGHAUS

WEB EXTRA

Watch a video about BU dental students and faculty in Teacapan, Mexico, at bu.edu/bostonia.

the 172 schools; only schools that allowed the Review to contact students were included in the ratings.

BU’s faculty outranked those at what the Review called “similar schools,” a grouping that includes Harvard, Boston College, Northwestern, and the University of Virginia.

“We prize both scholarship and teaching quality, and our faculty reflect that commitment,” says Maureen O’Rourke, dean of LAW. “The

Princeton Review ranking shows that our students also recognize and appreciate the superb ability of our faculty.”

In its two-page profile of LAW, the book praises the school’s “breadth of curricula that is matched by few other schools anywhere in the country.” The write-up quotes one student who calls the faculty “shockingly good”; another says, “Several of my professors rank as the best teachers I have had at any level.” It notes that

most LAW students give the school high marks for classroom discussions that accept diverse opinions. The book also reports that 93 percent of LAW students pass the bar exam on their first try, and that the average starting salary for an alum is \$135,000.

“BU Law is one of the most prestigious law schools in the country, and admission is extraordinarily competitive,” reports *The Best 172 Law Schools*.

The Review ranks the law

schools in 11 categories, giving each school a score in each category. It does not compile a single list of the best overall schools. But Paul L. Caron (LAW’88), a visiting professor at Pepperdine Law School, came up with his own ranking, based on the Review’s data, by excluding some categories the Review used and combining scores from the remaining categories. Caron placed BU fifth among law schools nationally.

RICH BARLOW