

# Where There Is No Dentist

by Murray Dickson

**updated and expanded**

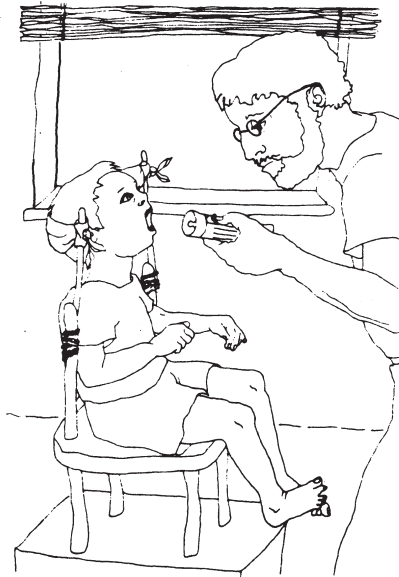
with information about HIV and AIDS

by Richard Bebermeyer,

Martin Hobdell and Gene Stevenson

Introduction by David Werner,

author of *Where There Is No Doctor*



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### **THIS BOOK CAN BE IMPROVED WITH YOUR HELP.**

If you are a community health worker, doctor, parent, or anyone with ideas or suggestions for ways this book could be changed to better meet the needs of your community, please write to Hesperian at the above address or email us at [hesperian@hesperian.org](mailto:hesperian@hesperian.org). Thank you for your help.

This book has been printed in the US by BR Printers.

## THANKS

*Where There Is No Dentist*, updated edition, 2025

### Thanks from Hesperian

We continue to be inspired by Murray Dickson and his tireless efforts to encourage health and dental promoters and community members to respond self-reliantly to their health needs. A few years ago, Murray introduced us to Richard Bebermeyer, Martin Hobdell, and Gene Stevenson, whom we thank for volunteering their time to write and develop the manuscript for Chapter 12 in this book, “HIV and Care of the Teeth and Gums.” That material was originally published in 2002 and distributed as a supplement to the previous edition of *Where There Is No Dentist*. We also thank Jane Maxwell, who edited the supplement with assistance from Darlena David, Julie Gerck, and Todd Jailer.

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### Thanks from Murray Dickson, 1983

*Where There Is No Dentist* is here to fill a need. To many people, it has seemed that the existing books about dental care were either too incomplete or too complicated. If this book fills that need, it is only because a number of people worked hard to make it happen. To them I owe my sincere thanks.

Much has happened since that day in Papua New Guinea when David Werner’s letter arrived. His challenge was simple: “Since no one else has written a dental manual like this, why don’t you?” With David’s encouragement and constant support, I was able to take teaching notes and produce a suitable draft that was the basis for this book. To you, David, for your patience in helping

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This book is based upon several years of practical experience, made possible by the Canadian Organization CUSO. For this opportunity, and for CUSO's active interest and involvement in this book, I most gratefully say thanks.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my family's contribution. For weeks on end, my wife, Gerri, faithfully read and discussed with me each part of the book as it changed and was rewritten. She did this cheerfully, at a time when she was fully occupied in a graduate study program. For much longer than I had anticipated, Gerri and our two boys, Michael and Brennan, had to tolerate my preoccupations.

My parents endured my wanderings and search for answers to human problems with love and a growing sense of understanding. It is my only disappointment that they did not live to see this book in its final form.

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# PREFACE TO THE 2015 EDITION

by Murray Dickson

The world has witnessed breathtaking changes since I wrote the first edition of *Where There Is No Dentist* in 1983. I sometimes feel that if a person had gone to sleep then and woke up 32 years later, they would have a difficult time understanding many of the things we take for granted today. Unfortunately, however, they would also find much remains the same, especially the unequal relations among people. Since you can look into a person's mouth and understand a lot about their income, nutrition, and general health and well-being, the inequality among people is not only a moral or ethical problem, but a dental problem as well.

As noted in the book's introduction, dental care remains beyond the financial reach of too many people in all parts of the world— developed, underdeveloped and overdeveloped. While many more poorer countries have picked up on the World Health Organization's primary health care strategy and initiated training and support of front line dental therapists, it is not sufficient to reach the majority of those in need. Governments that are finally getting around to improving health insurance or extending health care to geographically or economically marginalized communities still treat dental care as an afterthought, as the last benefit to arrive.

Another change that has occurred, and not for the better, is the spread of diabetes into communities where it had never been a problem or maybe only a minor one. While classified as a Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) because it is not spread by germs, it is however spread by changes in diet and behaviors around the world. While sugary drinks such as Coca Cola were a problem for oral health before, now their spread threatens not just teeth but the heart, liver, indeed the entire body. The same is true of processed foods of many varieties: healthy diets have been replaced by factory foods and junk foods which contain too much sugar and not enough nutrition.

In Istanbul in 2013, the International Dental Federation noted that “36 million people die every year from NCDs, and 86% of the premature deaths occur in developing countries.” They issued a call for dentists to not only advocate for and promote oral health, but to commit themselves to take more responsibility in contributing to the improvement of the general health, quality of life, and well-being of their patients and the public at large. That kind of broad understanding of health and commitment to working for social justice is exactly what I hope people find in *Where There Is No Dentist*.

I am very happy that Hesperian is printing a new edition of *Where There is No Dentist*. But even more satisfying is knowing that the book continues to be used to train, empower, and motivate collaboration with new generations of dental health promoters and therapists. As a dentist, I always felt good about relieving a person's pain and/or infection, but the number of people who needed help was always more than I could ever hope to treat. Only through extending primary care, and making oral health a part of that care, can we ever hope to really make progress. And today that means promoting people's rights to a healthy diet, a dignified life, and access to health care.