



# Local dentist headed overseas

Kankakee dentist  
Dr. Syreeta Jones  
to head  
Hospitals for  
Humanity unit

● **A4**



The Daily Journal/Michelle Gannon

**Dr. Syreeta Jones, DDS, prepares a patient for an extraction at her office in Kankakee Tuesday afternoon.**

# Local dentist donates time overseas

## Jones to head Hospitals for Humanity unit

By Nicole Leonhardt

nleonhardt@daily-journal.com  
815-937-3385

When the founders of Hospitals for Humanity added a branch to the organization, they plucked the new department's leader from their family tree.

Dr. Syreeta Jones, a Kankakee dentist, will run Hospitals for Humanity's new dentistry unit for her cousins Segun Ajayi and Kellye Smith-Essien. Ajayi, an ophthalmologist, and Smith-Essien, a registered nurse, created the organization in their hometown of Kankakee in 2005 after a trip to Africa made them aware of a lower quality of health care than they were used to in the states.

The brother and sister team sought volunteer doctors and nurses, and started providing general inter-

nal medicine and ophthalmology services to people in developing countries. Smith-Essien said hundreds of volunteers applied to work the medical missions in Nigeria, Haiti, Jamaica and the Philippines. But the duo didn't need to take applications when they decided to add a dentist to the mix.

"She's committed and dedicated and that's what we look for when we preen our people," Smith-Essien said.

Smith-Essien said the organization added dentistry not only because volunteers saw a need for it on their travels, but because good oral health adds to a person's overall health.

"Having good oral care decreases a lot of other health issues that may come up," said Smith-Essien, who now works as a registered nurse in Georgia.

Jones said taking care of your teeth can reduce the risk of heart disease, which is important because the doctors have seen a variety of heart health concerns abroad.

"A lot of people don't understand how important oral health is to overall general health and quality of life. A lot of things going on in your mouth can affect other parts of your body," Jones said.

In March, Jones will spend a week away from her dental practice at 401 N. Wall St., Kankakee, to go on her first mission trip. She will accompany her cousins and about 40 volunteer doctors and nurses to a village called Okija in Anambra State, Nigeria. Jones said she believes she is the only volunteer from Kankakee going on the trip since Ajayi also moved away. He is working with Howard University's eye team in Washington, D.C.

Smith-Essien said the needs of the village have been assessed by doctors from the organization to help prepare for the trip.

From the information gathered, Smith-Essien and Jones said the dental procedures for the 5,000 patients they expect to see should range from emergency extractions to cleanings.

Jones said she will be taking some of her own equipment to the Nigerian clinic she will use. The organization has funds for equipment and transport from last summer's golf outing fundraiser at the Kankakee Elks Country Club and individual contributions. Donations can be made at hospitalsforhumanity.org.

Hospitals for Humanity doesn't just need monetary donations. Jones said anyone willing to donate toothbrushes and toothpaste that she can take to her new patients can do so by stopping by her office or calling (815) 933-4121.

Along with performing necessary services, Jones said she plans to teach her patients about the importance of good oral health and give them tools and instructions they will need to maintain their mouths.

THE DAILY  
JOURNAL

www.daily-journal.com