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Vallejo dentist headed to the Philippines

Will treat poor Filipinos living near Manila

By KRISTIN MAYER, Times-Herald correspondent
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Dr. Romeo E. Basa has been around floss, picks, drills and rubber gloves his whole dental career. But next month he heads to impoverished villages in the Philippines where virtually no one has even seen a dental instrument.

Families of 10 live together without toothbrushes. Sores spot their bleeding gums and black marks grow on broken teeth, signaling the presence of bacteria.

For Basa, born in the Philippines 79 years ago, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." And that means doing everything he can to stabilize the dental deterioration that leads to more troublesome ailments like cancer.

"Before I die, I want to do something for people who are living in the Philippines," said Basa, who recently established the Basa Foundation with the belief that regular teeth cleaning is the best way to stay healthy.

Basa and his wife, Dolly, will move across the globe next month to treat 3,000 poor Filipinos living near Manila.

Dentists and dental hygienists at two nearby universities will monitor patients on a monthly basis for eight consecutive years. X-rays and examinations will document whether a cleaner mouth reduces the



Dr. Romeo Basa is a dentist who is heading to the Philippines to treat people. At right is Dr. Carmen de las Alas. They are both Vallejoans. Photo: David Pacheco/Times-Herald

chance of cancer. A control group of equal size will continue without any dental care.

"No toothbrush, nothing for medicine, nothing for food," Basa said of his patients' living conditions. "But the air is always there. That's why they're living."

Basa theorizes that fresh air counters the effects of poor dental hygiene, slowing the onset of potentially fatal diseases.

From 1974 to 1984, Basa worked as a dentist at Vallejo's Sutter Solano Medical Center. He also spent many years founding and teaching at respiratory therapy schools in San Francisco and Sacramento.

His research was inspired by his knowledge of respiratory problems and complications linked to bacteria that survive without oxygen in the mouth.

"Fresh air is the best medicine," Basa said. "How about when you sleep and never brush your teeth? How about this decay? People are too focused on cosmetic changes rather than really addressing the problem."

Dr. Carmen de las Alas, a leading immunologist in the Philippines and Vallejo resident, published data in the 1980s linking throat infections like streptococcus to kidney diseases that can develop into cancer. Basa's research and treatment could extend that cause and effect connection to include dental infections.

Now de las Alas and Basa are looking forward to a vaccine under development that would stunt the problem at its source.

"Vaccine is the 'in' thing," de las Alas said. "It's a blessing."

The staff needed to run the clinics and monitor the clients will employ Filipinos who are eager for work in the dental field.

"I know exactly just how bad some of the places are that need help," said Dolly Basa, a registered nurse who worked in her husband's dental office. "We've been working really hard on organizing things and setting up, and we have a lot to do. He loves to help his people." The couple eats a lunch of soup, salad and fish for \$2.50 at the

Bayanihan Center around the corner from their Vallejo home at **Bayview Vista Senior Apartments**. They live modestly, saving every penny to invest in the project.

Basa expects to collect \$20 million in tax-deductible donations for the foundation. He's seeking financial help from everyone from Bill Gates to his neighbors.

In his spare time, Basa sings karaoke. He enjoys serenading the other Bayview Vista residents and doesn't hesitate to break out into "That's Amore," his favorite Italian song.

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