



Australian Society of Orthodontists launches Give a Smile™ program in June

On June 8, the Australian Society of Orthodontists (ASO) announced its new goodwill program — Give a Smile™ (GAS) — to the public during a special celebration at Luna Park in Melbourne, Australia. Representatives from the ASO were joined by the Hon. Tony Abbott, the Federal Minister for Health in Australia; Shane Bourne, an actor/comedian; and 160 school children for this event.

The (GAS) program will enable ASO orthodontists to give a smile both figuratively and literally to people who are in great need of orthodontic care, but whose financial circumstances prevent them from accessing treatment through the private health system. On an annual basis, each participating orthodontist will provide free orthodontic treatment to one fellow Australian who is a public patient.

“Australia, like all developed countries, has a significant section of its community where circumstances deny those individuals and their families access to private orthodontic care,” said ASO President Dr. Ted Crawford, who founded the program after receiving the inspiration for it from his wife, Di. “As orthodontists, we occupy a special and privileged position in the community. Giving back — in the form of our skill and care — is an important part of the responsibility that comes with that privilege.”

Currently, the average waiting time for orthodontic treatment in the public health system is measured in years, not months.

“Give a Smile™ will help the public health system treat more patients in this sector. Roughly, the number of treatment starts that the public health system does across Australia is around 2,000 per year,” said Dr. Crawford, noting that GAS orthodontists could potentially boost the number of treatment starts by 15 percent on an annual basis. “The heads of all the

dental health departments around Australia are just thrilled with the program and have been very supportive of Give a Smile™.”

So far the program has been well received by members of the ASO. Four hundred members are eligible to participate in GAS. As of early May, more than 130 of these orthodontists had signed up for the program, exceeding the ASO’s initial participation goal for the inaugural year. ASO leaders now hope to have 40 percent of the eligible membership participating by the end of the year.

Practitioners who currently work within the public dental health departments will serve as screeners for the program. In addition, the ASO has selected a member in each state and territory to coordinate the process and match the patients with orthodontists.

“I am proud to be associated with the ASO, whose members have shown enthusiastic and selfless support for this wonderful program,” Dr. Crawford said in May. “Already, even before the public launch, there appears to be a ripple-on effect. We now have other dental practitioners who, on hearing about the Give a Smile™ program, have volunteered services that lie outside the scope of orthodontic treatment for GAS patients. Give a Smile™ is only a few months old, but it seems to have struck a chord amongst the orthodontists of Australia and also in the wider community.”

For more information on Give a Smile™, please contact Dr. Crawford at tedcrawf@netspace.net.au.