Paras, a 4th year Dentistry student travelled to the Philippines to carry out work in local clinics carrying out both curative and preventative projects with local adults and children.

In clinic Paras was able to observe and assist up to 50 tooth extractions per day, where she was challenged to adapt to local cross infection protocol. The lack of sterilisation procedures and other infection control measures were alien to her, having only practiced in the NHS previously where such practices would be a cause to question fitness to practice. However, she soon picked up the ‘no touch technique’ the clinicians embraced. Ensuring that she didn't pick up different habits, while adapting and remaining efficient throughout the experience, was a large hurdle for Paras to overcome and she feels that doing so has been a significant learning experience for her.

The preventative scheme, targeted at school students, involved application of fluoride varnish as well as fissure sealant, collecting data for government research while searching for the ‘orally fit child’.

It was eye opening for Paras to see the significant widespread decay present and communication was vital in getting the message across, but she faced a significant language barrier. She overcame this by using teeth models and tooth brushes, and getting students to show how they brush, as well as showing pictures of when to brush - actions speak louder than words!

For Paras, the most rewarding aspect of the project was the fieldwork. She found visits to schools in villages highly rewarding and enjoyed meeting students of all ages to share oral healthcare lessons with them while maintaining an element of fun and enjoyment. Iloilo is known as the city of love in the Philippines, the friendly and warm nature of the local people became the most rewarding aspect of the experience.

Educationally, the project significantly benefitted Paras - it has opened her eyes to numerous techniques from local anaesthesia administration to suturing and was an opportunity to appreciate the resources, qualifications and teaching facilities available in the UK. The difference in practice enabled her to identify areas where she could become more productive and time efficient with her time on clinic.

Paras found the kind, warm-hearted Filipinos fantastic to work with. After only a week of working alongside local people, she was communicating in the local dialect, developing her communication skills and overcoming language barrier hurdles.
Paras says:

“I deeply encourage other students to take part and apply for funding for volunteering trips abroad. The experience is vital in furthering your field of knowledge and really opens up avenues and ignites passion that you may never have thought about before!”