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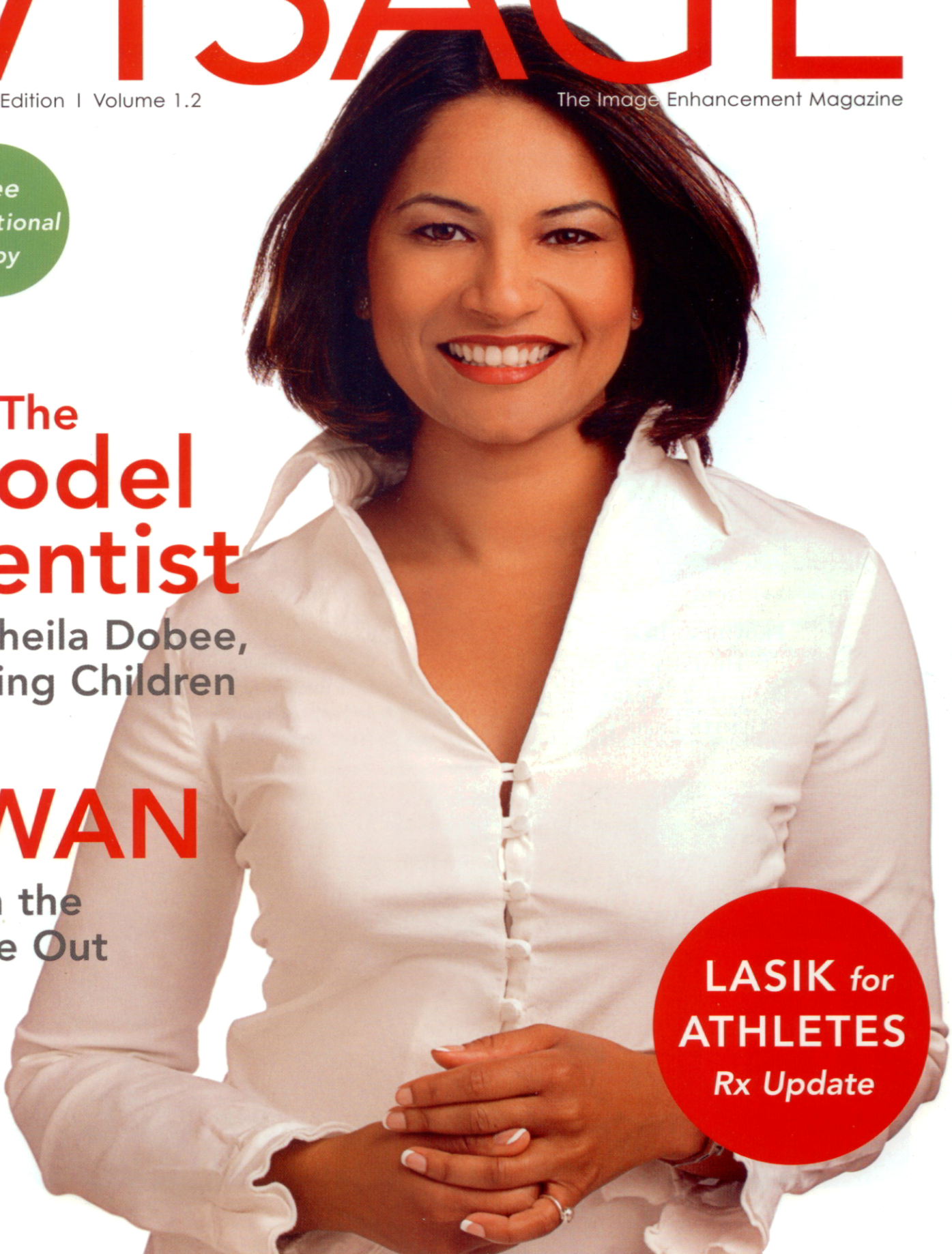
The Model Dentist

Dr. Sheila Dobee,
Helping Children

The SWAN

From the
Inside Out

LASIK *for*
ATHLETES
Rx Update



The MODEL DENTIST

by Glynnis Kaye

Sheila Dabee is on a mission to make kids smile.

- In her volunteer work with abused women and their children, the Fremont, California, dentist meets a lot of kids who are teased about their teeth, or, in some cases, their lack of teeth. "I met one kid who said, 'I don't smile because I don't have any front teeth,'" she says. "Imagine being a kid and not smiling. That's just horrible!"
- Dr. Dabee understands the value of a smile—not just from her perspective as a dentist—but also from her "secret hobby" as a model.

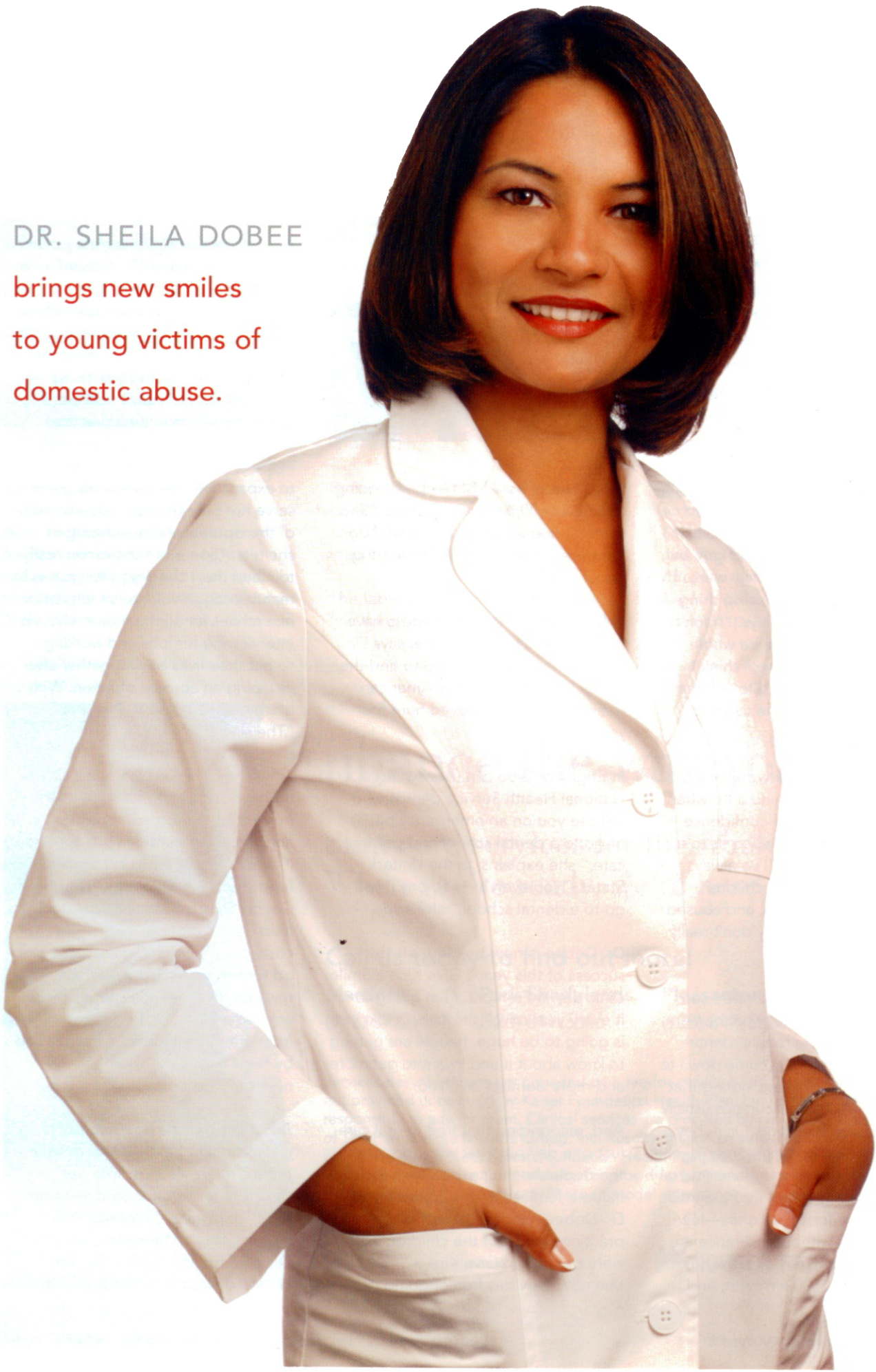
She began modeling nine years ago to help finance her education at the prestigious University of London Dental Institute at Guy's, King's College, and St. Thomas' Hospitals. "My face is different—I have an exotic look. You can't really tell where I'm from," says Dr. Dabee. She was born and raised in London, but her parents originally hail from Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar.

While she still models occasionally, Dr. Dabee is now better known for her educational and philanthropic projects in the dental community. Her current efforts include working with the Southern Alameda County Dental Society to encourage local dentists to deliver thousands of dollars of free dental care to children from abusive households on national "Give Kids a Smile Day." The American Dental Association (ADA) created this annual event to build community support and help underserved children receive regular dental care. At the last Give Kids a Smile Day on Feb. 4, 2005, close to 11,000 dentists and 30,000 other volunteers provided oral health education, screening, and treatment services to more than 500,000 children from low-income families across the United States.

Among the participants in 2005 were 22 dentists and 33 other volunteers who Dr. Dabee brought together to form a temporary clinic in Fremont. In one day, they delivered over \$35,000 in free dental care to children residing in Bay Area domestic violence shelters.

DR. SHEILA DOBEE

brings new smiles
to young victims of
domestic abuse.



Got Milk?

Don't be surprised if you catch

Dr. Sheila Dobee with a milk mustache; she was recently chosen as media ambassador for the "Got Milk?" campaign, a partnership between the California Dental Association and the California Milk Processor Board.

In that role, she works with the media to spread the word that twice-a-year dental check-ups are critical to good oral health and that drinking milk may help prevent cavities.



Dr. Dobee (center) brought together volunteers, including Dr. Steve Fong (left) and Dr. Ruchi Nijjar, to bring free dental care to kids in Bay Area shelters.

Prior to the event, Dr. Dobee visited several of the shelters to publicize the free clinic and pre-screen kids.

"I looked in kids' mouths and got an idea of how bad things really were. It was the most heartbreaking thing—a real eye-opener," she says. "I don't think people realize there's a whole different lifestyle out there. I think I was lucky enough to see a lot of that and now it's motivated me to try to really make a difference."

"Any kind of trauma that you have as a child can really affect you a lot when you're older—either self-confidence or self-worth, and future success to an extent," she continues. "I've always felt really strongly about children, especially abused children, and abused women as well. I think they don't really have a voice."

While at the shelters, Dr. Dobee surveyed women to find out what barriers they face in obtaining regular dental care. Most of the barriers come down to dollars and cents, she says, noting that even the few who have insurance usually have inadequate coverage. Or, if they have a health maintenance organization (HMO) plan, they may face several months of waiting to get into a dentist. And they're the fortunate ones—low-income families without insurance are pretty much out of luck. "I spoke to a mom who earns \$500 a month, and

fixing one of her kids' teeth was going to cost \$1,600," says Dr. Dobee. "She couldn't find a dentist that would do a payment plan. It's horrible hearing about this."

In England, low-income people have better access to dental care, says Dr. Dobee, who was surprised to find the obstacles faced by many American patients when she moved here four years ago.

In England, "you can usually find a National Health Service dentist who will see you on an emergency basis, or go to a dental school and get free care," she explains. In the United States, "you even have to pay if you go to a dental school," she adds.

Dr. Dobee is now building on the success of this year's Give Kids a Smile clinic day in Fremont. "I'm going to do it every year now," she says. "Next year is going to be huge. People are getting to know about it and I want to get more and more dentists involved."

And, recognizing that free dental care just one day per year will not solve the dental health crisis among low-income families in the United States, Dr. Dobee has "adopted" into her practice several of the children who were treated on Give Kids a Smile Day. She now provides free ongoing care

for them, and is actively seeking other dentists to adopt additional low-income kids in their practices.

In the future, Dr. Dobee would like to expand the free dental programs to serve not only children, but also more of the women who are staying in shelters. "Some of the women really touched me," she says. Her goal is to recruit enough volunteers to provide nice smiles for all the moms who are interviewing for jobs and working to get their lives back together after escaping an abusive situation. With more people helping, she says, "The sky's the limit."

The next Give Kids a Smile Day will be held on Feb. 3, 2006. Dentists, hygienists, other dental professionals, and general volunteers are needed to make the event a success. Philanthropic funds from the Southern Alameda County Dental Society are available to help dental professionals offset the costs of supplies and anesthesia needed for the services they donate. The rewards for those who get involved are tremendous, Dr. Dobee says. Thanks from grateful moms are accompanied by hugs from kids—kids who are now smiling. ●

If you have questions, would like to get involved in the Give Kids a Smile project, or are a dentist who can "adopt" a low-income child into your dental practice, call Melinda Miller at the Southern Alameda County Dental Society at 510.782.5316 or Dr. Dobee at 510.793.8515.