

Health Talents International  
Eye Surgery Clinic  
July 18-25, 2009

Trip Participants: MD's: Gene Kirby, Larry Patterson; Surgical Techs: Josh Reyes, Sarah Wilson; Nurses: Glenn and Neva Berkey, Rebecca Mitchell; Medical Student: Michael Patterson; Optometry Student: Jennifer O'Neil; Sterilization: Dee Anderson, John Flynt; Non-Medical volunteers: Lori Patterson, Mary Patterson, Esther Schara; Team Leader: Julie Wheatley

What a great week we had in Guatemala last week! We got off to a bit of a bumpy start at the airport when some of the team members were sent through to the exit and others were asked to pass through to have their bags be inspected. We had paperwork stating that all the items we were bringing into the country were cleared by the Ministry of Health in Guatemala before we brought them down. Despite our efforts to avoid being taxed on our supplies by working with the Ministry of Health we were still subject to the taxes imposed by the Customs office. Thankfully they worked with us and we were able to bring in our "disposable supplies" like lenses and sterile supplies without any taxes.

After our two hour stay at the airport with the customs officers we loaded into three pick-up trucks and headed down to Montellano. When we arrived in Montellano we unloaded our supplies and Dr. Kirby, Josh and Sarah had their first look around the hospital. When we pulled through the gates of Ezell we were greeted by several patients and their family members. Dr. Kirby and Dr. Patterson got themselves set up quickly and started to see the patients and schedule them for surgery for the next day.

The two doctors made a great team. Dr. Patterson had been to Guatemala many times and was able to get things running smoothly while Dr. Kirby and his scrub tech Josh pitched in with their years of experience and great knack for efficiency. We wrapped up Sat. night with dinner and orientation and said goodnight.

Sunday morning was relaxing as we had breakfast together, prepared for the day and headed across the street to church. By the time church was over Josh and Sarah had the rooms all set up and our staff at Clinica Ezell had the patients all ready so the doctors dove right into surgery before lunch. Surgery went well for both doctors and we were wrapped up in plenty of time to share dinner together.

After dinner Michael Patterson led the group through a very thought provoking devotional. Everyone was very impressed with Michael's well thought out and challenging devotional talks throughout the week. He did a nice job of incorporating the eye theme into his talks by reminding us what it is like to live with or without light and reminding us that we are to be light in this world. We appreciated his willingness to share with us each night.

Monday morning we dove right into surgery. Dr. Kirby and Dr. Patterson swapped back and forth operating while Josh and Sarah worked to clean up and set up the OR. While all the business was happening in the OR, Dee and John were busily sterilizing instruments and making sure that the

surgeries could take place without delay. They did a super job all week long and the surgeons were never left waiting for their instruments. The sterilization room was once again the hang out spot in the OR since Dee brought down lots of yummy snacks!

Several other people helped to make the week run smoothly. While Dr. Kirby and Dr. Patterson were operating Jennifer O'Neil was screening patients and checking visual acuity. She really made the screening process go quickly by helping with that and making sure that the patients eyes got dilated before the doctors came to take a look at them. After Jennifer saw the patients Michael brought them into the exam room and checked them out with the slit lamp to help give the surgeons an idea of what was going on in each patient's eye.

Dr. Kirby was of great help with some of our accessory eye equipment. He found a couple different machines and used them to measure the eye in order to decide what size implant a patient needed. His help was great because now we know more about the use of the machines and will be able to keep them on hand and functioning for future teams!

Tuesday flew by until the microscope foot pedal stopped working on Tuesday afternoon. The surgeons were forced to work with what they could and do their best to "zoom and focus" by moving the microscope around by hand. Although it was a great inconvenience for each of them the doctors made it through the next few days of surgery. We did attempt to change out a fuse we thought might be the problem but the microscope started to smoke from the tower when we turned it on after replacing the fuse...we just left it alone after that! We are hoping to have the microscope pedal back in working condition for the November trip and we thank the surgeons on this trip for putting up with this inconvenience and sticking out the week with us!

While the surgery was happening Glenn and Neva were busy helping wherever they could. Glenn was there every time a surgery ended to help turn over the room. Neva was always available to get the proper drops into patients' eyes along with Rebecca; their help was appreciated by both doctors. Their meticulous record taking and promptness was a great asset to the team. We now have two more towers set up for laparoscopic surgery thanks to Glenn. Between surgeries he was busy digging through the equipment storage room and piecing working parts together to make them useful once again! We are so blessed to have him and Neva as a part of the HTI team in Guatemala.

On Wednesday the doctors finished up all the surgeries and patient consults in time for the group to take a trip to the cacao farm. As expected everyone was thoroughly impressed with the massive ceiba tree on the farm. Don Augusto was happy to see our group and was pleased when we told him it was an eye surgery team. He had surgery at Ezell in March so he had a special connection to the eye team. Daisy and the rest of the family were happy to show us around the farm and let us eat their chocolate!

Thursday was another great day with about seven surgeries. At the end of the day our surgery total was 46 surgeries and one splinter extraction which Dr. Patterson took care of in clinic giving us a grand total of 47. Thursday afternoon most of the group headed up to Chicacao for some ice cream. Dr. Kirby

treated everyone to some Sarita's and we walked around the park and through the church and market place. Michael Patterson had the chance to run over and visit the family he stayed with during the MET program. They still had a hand drawn picture of him on the wall in their home! It was special for him to introduce them to both his new wife Lori and his sister Mary.

Thursday night Dr. Patterson led us in our devotional time and helped us to wrap up the great week. His thoughts were deep and encouraging for future service and deeper spirituality. After his talk we gave everyone the opportunity to share something about their experience throughout the week. Dr. Kirby passed around a couple different pictures on his laptop he had taken that day. He reminded us once again that we are to show the world the love of Christ in such a way that they think, "I want that!".

Friday morning started out nicely with the patients' checks going well in recovery but then at breakfast we got word that there were strikes planned for that day at several points along the road we take to get back to Antigua or Guatemala City. We decided to head that direction and see how things were and if we might be able to get through after all. We arrived all the way to the beginning of the first road block. The people were burning tires and blocking the way in order to protest the increase in the electric company's prices. After about an hour waiting there at the block the police showed up and cleared off the road. We were able to make it through that road block as well as the two that followed without any trouble after that. We were thanking God for His protection!

Antigua was lovely once we arrived and we all shared a nice dinner together at the hotel. Saturday morning we had some breakfast and hit the road. The team was dropped off at the airport, goodbye's were said and we hope that they all come back soon!

Written by: Julie Wheatley