

Health Talents International
General/GYN Surgical Trip
April 17-24, 2010

Trip Participants: **General Surgeons:** Benny Cleveland, Mark Crane; **GYN Surgeons:** AnaMaria Gray, Fred Mecklenburg, Rachel Seay, Shannon Becker; **ENT Surgeon:** Jerry Templer; **UroGYN:** George Shashoua; **Urologist:** Grady Bruce; **Physical Therapist:** Leslie McGehee; **Anesthesia providers:** Tiffany Horton, LD Herzog, Eddie Milam; **Medical Students:** David Brunett, Marshall Early; **Nurses:** Peggy Hood, Aaron Towler, Leslie Smith, Grace Jensen, Michael Caldwell, Glenn Berkey, Richard Yates, Christi Bowe, Fran Sutton, Elaine Griffin, Lisa Bartee, Brenda Robinson, Neva Berkey; **Compassionate caregivers:** Nathaniel Crane, Rachel Skinner, Brenda Grant, Nathan Shashoua; **Sterilization:** Doyle Robinson, David Stephens; **Chaplain:** Klay Bartee; **Handy Man:** Dennis Griffin; **Team Leaders:** Rick Harper, Julie Wheatley

Health Talents takes many teams to Guatemala each year. Most of the time we are blessed to arrive in Guatemala on time, with all of our luggage and are able to get on the road to Clinica Ezell fairly quickly. This trip however was not one of those times. There was mass confusion at the airport in Houston because a train had derailed the night before so the city of Houston came in and shut down the train system until further inspections were completed. Just imagine with me a loooooong hallway crammed full of people who are stressed out because they need to change terminals to catch their flight. Now imagine the airport staff coming by and telling these people that there is only one bus shuttling about 30 people at a time between the terminals! YIKES! Unfortunately this was the reality we faced upon arrival in Houston on the 17th. Our group decided that waiting in the unmoving and immensely long line would not get us to our flight on time. Plan B was to leave the secure area of the airport and catch the little Disney World style tram that ran between the terminals beneath the airport. The 11 people from our group hustled down to this train hoping that there wouldn't be a massive line to get back through security. The hopes were crushed when we arrived at terminal E to find another loooooong line. So we waited and watched the hour of departure slip slowly by as we stood there. The flight waited as long as it could but finally left without our group of 11. The first half of the team that made the flight entered into Guatemala without any trouble and met up with our staff at the airport. Meanwhile back in Houston the rest of us stood in line hoping for a seat on the 11:00am flight into Guatemala. God was with us and there were seats for all on the flight so we made it into Guatemala City and met up with the rest of the group.

Customs was a breeze and we headed out to the chicken bus to load our luggage. Once everyone was situated we headed toward Montellano. Our trip was slow going because of traffic. On an average day in Guatemala City there is traffic but this day it seemed never ending! After we passed through the normally congested area we thought we were home free until we were once again sitting bumper to bumper wondering what in the world was going on? Well, rainy season had begun and with the rain come the mudslides. The traffic jam was due to a mudslide that was almost totally gone by the time we reached it, there were two guys with shovels left of the side of the road as we drove past. After several hours on the bus we made it to Ezell safe and sound. We had dinner right away and then the surgeons

got to work seeing their pre-op patients for the following day. We had an abbreviated orientation that night and headed to bed.

Sunday morning we had a nice breakfast followed by a fuller version of orientation. We then headed across the street to worship with the Montellano Church of Christ. Worship was lovely and Aaron Towler led us in a few songs in English and then the same songs in Spanish. We shared a lovely morning with the brothers and sisters of Montellano and then headed back to Ezell to get to work.

Dr. Walter and Rosario came and walked the team through the hospital orientation and then we sat down for lunch. Lunch was a short ordeal and the team set into motion operating on their cases and preparing the recovery room to receive patients. All surgeries went well and the surgeons were able to see their patients for the next day in the clinic. We wrapped up the day with a devotional time where Klay our chaplain told us that we would be talking about all the things that Jesus did wrong! He got our attention right away by taking that approach and his messages were very thought provoking. He pointed out the things Jesus did while on the earth that were the opposite of what the "should" have done, like leaving God's side to save a bunch of humans that would only turn their backs on him. Klay was also a huge help to a number of people on the team as well as some of the local staff and Christians in Guatemala. He is a counselor by trade and offered his services throughout the week. Many were blessed by his devotional thoughts that made us think "outside the box" as well as his ability to listen and provide such sound advice on issues like parenting and marriage.

Monday morning we started early and cruised right along. Many of the team members were veterans so things went rather smoothly in the operating rooms and the super efficient nurses handled the recovery area like pro's! The morning passed by quickly and then the pre-op patients for Tuesday arrived and the surgeons started popping into the OR and then into the clinics to see their patients. Once surgeries and pre-op evaluations were wrapped up it was time for dinner and devotional.

Tuesday started off somewhat abnormally with a small "temblor" or earth shake, not quite as strong as a "terremoto" or earthquake but strong enough to feel as we were getting ready for breakfast! The day went smoothly and the team worked together like a well oiled machine. One special patient that came to clinic was a little girl named Bani. She is a very sick little girl with several severe medical conditions. Dr. Walter had Julie take pictures of her to send to doctors in the USA to ask for help in treating her. WE ask for your prayers for this sweet little girl. She has since been hospitalized and we are hoping that she will be able to increase her weight with some good nourishment and be able to overcome her sicknesses.

Later in the day a patient named Maria Guarchaj who had been operated on the previous day started to worry us. She was still in considerable pain and her Hematocrit was slowly dropping. By dinner time we knew that Maria was not in good shape. The surgeons along with Doctor Walter and the anesthesia providers started to put their heads together to see what could be done for Maria. The pain Maria was in coupled with her dropping Hematocrit led the doctors to decide that she was bleeding internally and needed to be operated on again before the situation got any worse. The problem was that her blood count was so low at this point that we couldn't operate without a blood transfusion and we didn't have

ANY way to do blood transfusions or blood typing or anything at all. We started calling local hospitals asking for blood and got nowhere. Dr Walter also tried calling a laboratory and got no answer. We were unsure what to do and it was already 9pm. For about an hour we stood around discussing what to do. Do we transfer her into the care of the national hospital an hour away and hope that they can do the second surgery? When that idea was suggested to Maria she made it very clear that she did NOT want to go to the national hospital. She said "If you send me to the national hospital I'll die, please don't send me there"...of course this was said in Ki'che and translated into Spanish and now into English but you get the idea!

After that hour of scratching our heads Dr. Walter finally got in touch with the laboratory and they agreed to come out to Ezell and do the blood typing, testing and take blood from donors to give to Maria. We started asking our team members who had Maria's type O+ and we had about 8 people with O+ or O- blood who were willing to donate. The doctors wanted six units of blood to be safe and know that we had enough for Maria. We were praising God for providing us with so many team members who shared this blood type! By the time the lab people arrived it was already after 11pm and we had been up since 6:30 or earlier. The potential donors were screened, blood typed and there were exactly 6 people who were matches for Maria! These 6 all donated blood for her, including Dr. Grady Bruce who directly after donating his blood walked into the operating room to perform surgery on Maria, and Christi Bowe, RN, who donated and then got back up on her feet and worked in the recovery room all night long! Their service gave a new meaning to the expression "blood, sweat and tears"!

As the lab people were withdrawing the donor blood they asked us if we had the necessary tubing to go from the donated blood bag to the patient. Our hearts sank because we expected THEM to have the proper tubing. We didn't know where something like that would be or if we even had any! Rick, Rosario and others started searching in all the IV tubing and in all the storage rooms for ANYTHING that would work. Would you guess just how many sets of the exact tubing we needed were found? Yes, you guessed it, SIX exactly! We all breathed a sigh of relief and started transfusing the donated blood to Maria. With the donated blood in her system her Hematocrit went up enough for us to operate. The OR staff were woken up and they got everything rolling around 2:00am Wednesday morning. Maria was wheeled into the OR around 2:30am and the surgeons were able to find out quickly where the problem was. In plumbing terms they were able to, "plug the leak".

Around 3:30am Maria was moved into the recovery room and we all hovered as she woke up from her surgery and we were able to let her know that everything was going to be ok. Post surgery Maria did very well and walked out of the hospital feeling much better when she was discharged Friday morning. There were many prayers of thanks and prayers of adoration for the divine way in which God had intervened to save Maria's life. The staff made it to bed between 4:00-4:30am for a short rest before starting a new day of surgery all over again by 8am the next morning.

Wednesday morning many of the team got off to a slightly slower start but were happy to be back at work knowing that their loss of sleep was worthwhile as Maria was doing so well. More patients were treated for their hernias, prolapses, gall bladders and cysts and the day moved right along. The crew working in sterilization kept up with all the sterilization throughout the week like it was no sweat at all.

Their efforts made the whole trip possible! Not once did any of the surgeons have to wait on instruments in order to begin their cases. Everyone also appreciated the yummy snacks they kept well stocked! One exciting thing the sterilization crew was able to do was organize instruments in the new cabinets that were installed in the room. They worked hard to organize, label and clean instruments all week long.

Dr. Jerry Templer was a special addition to the team. He is a long time friend of Glenn and Neva Berkey and came down to help in any way he could. He was able to see a couple patients in clinic that Dr. Walter referred to him. We were glad to have him along and were thankful for his expertise in caring for our patients. Leslie McGehee, our physical therapist, was also in high demand. She saw a number of patients throughout the week. She was able to teach patients about their bodies, ways to stretch and strengthen muscles that would in turn help relieve some of their pain. They were all thankful and Leslie was much appreciated!

Thursday was a lighter day of surgery, mainly lumps and bumps for the general surgeons and minor "out-patient" sort of cases for the GYN and urology doctors. The general surgeons finished up the lumps and bumps early in the day. Three different groups went out on side trips. There was a small group that went in the morning to San Lucas Toliman on Lake Atitlan with Rick, later that afternoon a larger group headed there for a late lunch. The third group made their way to the cacao farm to visit Don Augusto and his family. Everyone had a nice day and enjoyed the break from being on their feet after a long week of surgery. That night the group gathered around the fountain in the dormitory for devotional time. Klay talked for a bit to start things off and then we went around the circle sharing about what had impacted each of us throughout the week.

Friday morning came and it was time to say goodbye to the remaining patients. Maria was able to go home feeling much better but we did have to refer one patient to the national hospital for follow up care. Santos had his gall bladder removed and was somewhat of a complicated case so we played it safe and had him transferred. Rosario and Ruth, two of our Guatemalan staff were able to visit him and reported that he was doing well and feeling better the following week. The group photo was shot and the chicken bus was loaded. We headed out to Antigua for a day of shopping and relaxation. The Volcano Fuego was puffing smoke as we drove by which made us really feel like we were in Guatemala! The day in Antigua was lovely. Everyone spread out to have lunch, get massages or spend their Quetzales. That evening we had dinner together at Hotel Antigua and said goodnight.

The next morning went by quickly; there was time for an early breakfast so everyone enjoyed the buffet before loading on the chicken bus once again. Things went smoothly at the airport and the return journey through Houston was much less eventful than the previous Saturday. We truly praise God for revealing Himself throughout the week and for taking care of our patients and our team.

Written by: Julie