

# Health Talents International

March 11-18, 2023, Surgical Team

Trip Participants: **Dentists:** Carson Henley, Bob Huffstutter; **Physician:** Stan Sizemore; **Ophthalmologists:** Lee Coleman, John Shipp; **Physician Assistant:** Houston Schoonmaker-**Occupational Therapist:** Elizabeth O'Brien; **Physical Therapist:** Trey O'Brian; **Nurses:** Alice Bush, Ashley Gerhard; **Marriage & Family Therapist:** Hannah Schoonmaker; **OR Tech/Circulators:** Amy Coleman, Jennifer Shipp; **ACU Leaders:** Amber and James Johnstone; **ACU Students:** Benjamin Ash, Ella Austin, Cortland Baum, Averi Berry, Emma Bussmeir, Youngseo Choi, Macy Frost, Anya Hahn, Kate Henderson, Bryan Herrera, Juan Mendoza, Nathan Palomino and Ariana Pereira; **Caregivers:** Maya Coleman, Merrick Coleman, Victoria Coleman, Isabelle O'Brien, Sarah O'Brien, Lynlee Shipp and Sheridan Shipp; **Translator Intake/Discharge:** Rita Sills; **Translator:** Jay LeBlanc; **Sterilization:** Cary Sills; **Team Leader:** Rick Harper

The current theme for the SEC Conference is, "It Just Means More." For those of you who know this was our first surgical team in three years, I hope you understand when I say, 'It Just Means More.'

It was March of 2020 when the Shipp and Coleman families, along with Bob Huffstutter, Cary and Rita Sills and I, Rick Harper, were last in Guatemala together. Our first inkling of how serious the Covid pandemic had become was when we learned that the NCAA basketball tournament, March Madness, had been canceled. Within days of returning to the US, classes were canceled, dorm rooms and borders closed and uncertainty gripped the world. As a result, March of 2023 'just means more.'

Clinica Ezell, now Clinica Ezell Hospital, had undergone a significant remodel and three construction projects, not counting repairs from the 2022 February earthquake. Our surgical equipment had been serviced but had nevertheless remained idle for three years. What would we find, what would we not find?

We found that air travel is more challenging, more expensive than ever...and we found volunteers committed to returning regardless. We found our facilities, our equipment in excellent condition and ready for service. Sure, we had a few hiccups, but the sixty-two surgical patients who received the gift of sight saw a people who were God loved, Jesus saved, Word fed and Spirit led. For them, and for us, it 'just means more.'

They covered us in prayer, and we covered them. We laughed, loved, lived and served. And before the week was over, a few tears were shed!

Dentists Carson Henley and Bob Huffstutter were rock stars, and our dental team was thrilled to see Dr. 'Baawb' return, you see he enjoys celebrity status. One lady had eleven root canals in a single day. That will wear out anyone, yet Bob will tell you that ours is the happiest dental clinic in the world. (We did not ask the record setting root canal patient how happy she was.)

Elizabeth and Trey O'Brien, occupational and physical therapists made their first trip with us, and brought their two precious daughters, Sarah and Isabelle. The Colemans, O'Briens and Shipp are all from Mississippi, so the slow, southern, melodious drawls echoed through the OR and exam rooms. Ya'll was heard almost as often as gracias!



It didn't take long for Guatemala to leave a mark on the O'Brien's hearts. The observed sweet Griselda being carried on her mother's back to receive physical therapy care for a dislocated hip.

Tender, calming care provided relief to Griselda and joy to her mother who wanted nothing more than what is best for her daughter.



For the O'Brien's she is a patient they will never forget, this is a trip that 'just means more.'

*Within a few days, Griselda received a customized wheelchair, complete with a harness to keep her safe and secure when unable to control her movements.*



Our physicians and dentists, Drs. Coleman, Henley, Huffstutter and Shipp were wonderful teachers. Pre dental students spent hours being mentored and inspired, and certainly the aid of the students in the OR was critical to our being able to care for so many patients. They functioned as second assistants in surgery, prepped patients beforehand and transported them to and from the OR with the fabulous Ms. Rita directing traffic.

Houston Schoonmaker, only a few years removed from being an ACU student on a Health Talents trip, was able to lead by example and encourage students to return once they were into their careers. Giving, giving back and loving every minute!

Cary Sills, a man of few words, kept the surgical instruments coming, anticipating what was needed next and when it appeared he was stumped looking for a unique instrument, found one that was suitable every, single time.

We concluded our time at Clinica Ezell Hospital, this place some call a spiritual oasis, with a time of sharing on Thursday evening. Laughter was abundant and stories aplenty; tears flowed freely and our hearts were filled.

In the land of eternal Spring, we sought to glorify our eternal Father with our first surgical team in 2023. I believe we were successful...it 'just means more.'

*By Rick Harper*

