

April 2008 General/GYN Surgical Week

Team Members: Surgeons: Dr. Benny Cleveland, Dr. Kris City, Dr. Fred Mecklenburg, Dr. Peter Rothschild, Dr. Cortney Harper; Anesthesia: Dr. Byron Brown, Dr. Cindy Brown, CRNA Jan Dehaven, Dr. Lee Hughes; Nurses: Ashley Anderson, Frances Avila, Christi Bowe, Neva Berkey, Alice Cladwell, Anita Garland, Janice Gray, Meredith Jones, Dell Kendrix, Jeanie Langston, Theora Lusk, Jackie Price, Vicki Ratts, Julia Swain, Mary Kaye Villalba; Surgical Tecs: Kristin Andrs, Tim Pethel, John Pratt; Med Students: Nathan and Megan DeWitt; EMT: Jonathan Clemens; Translators: Joanna Dittimore, Miquel Garland, Wendi Putzke, JoLee Thayer, Gina Waldron; Chaplain: Steve Curtis; Sterilization: Joe Bosch Sr. and Jr., Rex Bowe, Alan Towler; Handy man: Dalton McGraw; Nurses Aid: Susan Bell, Gabrielle Brown; Team Leader: Rick Harper and Julie Wheatley.

Saturday most of the group met at the airport without any trouble. Our New York contingent had a delayed flight and missed the flight to Guatemala because of that but in the end all team members made it to Guatemala safe and sound and without any lost bags. Once we arrived in Guatemala we were once again pleased with the new system they improve each time at the newly remodeled airport.

Alex, Danny and Darling all met the group at the airport with Pollo Campero in hand. The group spent the bus ride getting to know one another better and enjoying the scenery. Once we arrived at Clinica Ezell the team members found their rooms and got to work unpacking and inventorying supplies. The new members were led on a tour of the grounds as Rick told them about all the fruits and nuts growing on the property. Dinner was served and we held a brief meeting with introductions and a review of the schedule.

Sunday morning came with great joy and excitement on behalf of the team. Several people carried chairs over to church because we knew we would have a full house with a team as large as ours. The congregation was literally flowing outside the doors! Many team members were moved by the passionate singing and worship time at church. Dr. David Lux and his wife Sonia were present with their beautiful new little girl. The baby is happy and healthy and they have named her Jackilyn Sofia!

Once we headed back to Clinica Ezell we had a meeting with all of our medical staff and Dr. Walter and Rosario. We oriented our team with the patient charts and needle stick procedures. The team was then ready to get to work.

The surgeons started seeing patients and not long after lunch we were ready to go. The first day of operations went about like normal. People scurried all over the OR looking for what they needed, people adjusted to working together and patients were loved on. The group of non medical team members with spare time on Sunday were taken to the Finca de Cacao or the Chocolate Farm as it was labeled in English. Everyone loved the experience of seeing a family run farm and learning great amounts about the “*naturaleza*” of Guatemala.

Monday morning kicked off early and with great energy. The surgeons were itching to get into the operating room and the recovery room nurses were looking forward to having more patients to care for. On Monday we also had a few people make their way out into the villages for mobile clinics with Dr’s Walter and David. Team members slowly got the hang of their role in the week and were excited to be a part of the clinic.

Steve continued to provide our team with excellent thoughts that provoked deeper thinking on behalf of the team. He was enthusiastic and got to experience everything from a mobile medical clinic to being a second assist on a vaginal hysterectomy!

Dr. Cleveland was our lone General Surgeon for the week but he was up to the challenge. With the assistance of Zack Self or another med student, he was able to treat 35 patients and share his love and care with each one of them. We were thankful that he could be with us and bring his great energy and sweet disposition to our team.

By Tuesday things had started to run more smoothly. People knew where to find things and had adjusted to work well together. Tuesday morning went off without a hitch but the afternoon was not nearly so fortunate. We had a patient by the name of Maria Antonia Gomez in the afternoon after lunch. She had a vaginal hysterectomy and after returning to the recovery room was restless and in great pain. After some deliberating and checking her blood count (hematocrit) which had dropped from 39 pre-op to 20 post-op, the doctors decided that they needed to take her back into the operating room because of internal bleeding. This second procedure was done abdominally to find out where she was bleeding. They found the artery that was flowing and started to close up. As they were closing they realized that she was still bleeding from some other place and that they would need to go in again and stop the bleeding.

As the surgeons were operating and the patient was losing more and more blood we were trying to contact the family. We left several messages and at last got in touch with them and asked that they come to the hospital right away. Additionally there was a circle of team members that came to the OR and stood outside Maria's operating room. They stood there and prayed fervently for the surgeons, for Maria, for her family and for her life. You see, Maria Antonia is a Jehovah's Witness and had refused any blood transfusions. Although her son wanted her to have the transfusion she desperately needed, the other family members were opposed. They provided us with a signed form from Maria stating that she did not want any transfusions and they also signed a statement for us saying that despite the medical advice they would not allow her to receive a transfusion. This is a part of their belief system and they did not want to go against their beliefs even at the risk of losing Maria.

Once the doctors finished operating on Maria her blood count was at 10, a full 29 point drop from her pre-op level of 39. We rearranged the operating rooms to turn OR2 into an ICU unit for Maria. The doctors finished operating on the last three patients and everyone stayed in constant prayer for Maria. In OR 1 the doctors stopped, in the middle of a surgery, to say a short prayer for Maria when they heard she would have to be taken back to surgery. This team was a team united in prayer like no other. We were blessed to have many prayer warriors in the group and a God that heard our cries.

No one knew if Maria would make it through the night. Dr. Byron Brown, an anesthesiologist stayed through the night with Maria as she slowly stabilized. Around 3:30am she was able to be moved from the ICU room into the recovery room with constant supervision. When morning dawned on Wednesday and we learned that Maria had made it through the night there was a celebratory mood amongst the team and many prayers of thanks lifted up. Although Maria had made it through the night, she was still not out of the woods. We remained with constant supervision over her and supplementing her with medicines provided by her family to stimulate blood production.

As the week moved on we saw small improvements in Maria, one day she was able to sit up in a chair, she was still very weak but appeared to be feeling better little by little. Her family came and saw her at every opportunity. They were pleased with the care she received from our hospital and only moved Maria to another hospital when it was time for our group to leave. The road to full recovery for Maria will be long but I know that our team will continue to bathe her in prayer over the next weeks and months.

After this great panic on Tuesday we were grateful for a less eventful end to the week of operations. The last of our GYN patients on Wednesday were seen and helped without any complications. In all I believe the GYN team operated on 31 patients giving us a grand total of 66 for the week.

On Wednesday night a little two year old boy named Adán came down with a fever of 104°. He was given antibiotics for what turned out to be an ear infection and sent home the next day without having received his surgery for a hernia. He will be given a new appointment to try again in August.

The sterilization team worked hard all week long getting instruments ready and packaged for the next operation. We appreciated the hard work and constant attention of our sterilization crew. They were experts by the time the end of the week rolled around. They could find you a weighted speculum or a retractor in a heartbeat!

Another helper that was a blessing to many was our handy man Dalton. He made his way throughout the grounds helping here and there, repairing things and putting things back together. Sometimes it's people like Dalton that make a big difference throughout the week in lots of small ways. Our dental team was certainly appreciative of the chairs and lights he fixed for them!

As Thursday rolled around and things began to slow down we were unable to proceed as normal with our clinic in Xejuyup. Recently the bus fares have been increased an entire Quetzal on two different routes. The citizens of Chocoma decided that they didn't like that and were going to strike for a day. We got wind of the strike and knew that we would not be able to pass through there so instead of heading up to Xejuyup, Dr. Walter led a group of team members to the hot springs. It was a slippery adventure but the team members enjoyed the scenery and the vine and stick bridge a few of them crossed!

In the afternoon on Thursday we took another team to the Chocolate Farm. Once again everyone was delighted to meet the lovely family of Don Augusto and see the GIGANTIC Ceiba tree. This afternoon we were also led by this family to see some native Guatemalan animals at the town square in San Miguel Panan. For many of us it was the first time we had ever shaken hands with a monkey or seen a 6ft. long iguana! The afternoon was special and we were sad to depart from the family and head back to Ezell for dinner.

Steve Curtis had prepared an acronym for use throughout his evening devotionals and employed the word "health." H for hope, E for endurance, A for assurance, L for love, T for trust and H for home. We were all thrilled to finally put all the pieces together.

Our cooks did an incredible job as usual in feeding us and fattening us up. On Friday morning many in the group were sad to be leaving the great food at Clinica Ezell. Jan DeHaven's ABC child was able to come by and see her in the morning before we left for Antigua. She was so pleased to see how much he had grown and excited to chat with him

for a few moments. Many in the team went and said their final goodbyes to Maria and prayed over her once more. Then we loaded up on the bus and headed off for Antigua.

All went well until a large truck decided to back up into our ABC pickup! Rick was the driver but they were stopped when the truck hit our pickup so no one was hurt, thanks be to the Lord! We did however have to squeeze all the pickup riders into the chicken bus and the mini van. Rick waited for Carlos and they in turn waited for the insurance man while Danny and Julie headed to Antigua with the team. We were so grateful that there were no injuries among our team in the accident. God had his hands upon us.

Once in Antigua the team members got a hold of maps and hit the streets of town. They shopped, got massages, saw ruins and enjoyed the beautiful day. At dinner that evening Jeanie Langston's ABC child was able to join us. Jeanie visited with Theresa and encouraged her to study hard so that she could make it into veterinary school in the future.

At dinner many said farewell to the team members with different flight schedules and headed to their rooms to catch a little bit of shut eye before 3am. At 3am the next morning everyone showed up and we pulled out of the Hotel Antigua at 3:30am, right on schedule. Everyone made it onto the flight without any trouble and we were happy to be heading home while sad to be leaving.

Please remember our 66 patients in your prayers as they continue to heal and feel better. Please also remember Maria Antoina over the next weeks and months as she continues the process of healing. We praise God for hearing our prayers and sparing her life. We continue to pray for her spirit!

Blessings in Christ,

Julie



Don Augusto and his wife sharing sweet smiles in front of their Garden (of Eden!) Owners of the Cacao Farm.



Constant prayers being lifted up for our patient Maria Antonia