

April 2009 General/GYN Surgical Week

Team Members: Surgeons: Dr. Grady Bruce, Dr. Benny Cleveland, Dr. Ben Doke, Dr. Ana-Maria Gray, Dr. George Haight, Dr. Carolyn Harrington, Dr. Stella Lii; Anesthesia: Dr. Al Jones, Dr. Joey Tilton; Rheumatologist: Dr. Ric Alvillar; Dentist: Dr. Bradley Sears; Nurses: Sheri Batt, Christi Bowe, Barbara Burg, Alice Caldwell, Leslie Doke, Twyla Doty, DeVona Haight, Betsy Keene, Mauren Kopf, Barry McCullough, Fran Sutton, Kris Staszak, Lindsey Staszak, ; Med Students: Andrew McCormick, Mary McCormick; Surgical Assts: Glenn McGehee; Translators: Beth McCullough, Lily Salcedo, Petra Wirrell; Sterilization: Mike Caldwell, Brenda Grant; Nurses Aid: Mollie Keene, Brenda Knight; Compassionate Volunteers: Tanner Oakes, Tucker Galvin; Photographer: Greg Palmer; Team Leader: Rick Harper

What a wild start to a wonderful week! The flight delays began Friday night with calls from Denver and by Saturday morning, flights were canceled from Austin, Denver, Jackson and Little Rock. It took four more flights and a second day before we all arrived in Guatemala City. Most of the group arrived on Saturday morning, three arrived on Saturday afternoon, eight on Saturday night and one on Sunday morning. Alex was Mr. Dependable, working late into the evening to make sure everyone was safe and sound.

Dr. Al Jones met the group in Montellano, having spent the previous week volunteering his services at the Buen Samaritano Hospital in Chichicastenango and we quickly unpacked, began the final screening of surgical patients and settled in for the evening.

Sunday morning was a time of transition as we fine tuned preparation for the surgical clinic and took out time to worship with the Montellano church family. The addition of our team, visiting patients and the normal attendees meant we had an overflowing crowd for worship services.

Once we headed back to Clinica Ezell we had a meeting with all of our medical staff and Dr. Lux and Rosario. We oriented our team with the patient charts and needle stick procedures, broker for lunch and surgery began a short time later. We completed four GYN cases that afternoon and five general surgeries.

Sunday went quite smooth as the team began to settle in to a routine and our surgeons were able to screen some patients throughout the afternoon and avoid a late evening. The smooth beginning created great optimism, maybe a bit too much as twenty-four patients were scheduled for surgery on Monday with our GYN's scheduled to run one room all day and a second room half a day before turning it over to our general surgeons.

Monday morning kicked off early and with great energy as we ended up completing twenty-three cases after a long, long day. A few cases took longer than we expected, getting the laparoscopy equipment up and going required additional time and we challenged our recovery room nurses with patients coming out of surgery later in the day than normal. Fortunately, we had a strong RN corp despite the last minute loss of two RN's. (Missed flights and being snowbound in Denver took its toll on the original team.)

Monday was also the second day for Dr. Ric Alvillar, a rheumatologist to see patients and he was able to provide relief to dozens suffering from rheumatoid arthritis and other related pain issues. Dr. Alvillar would be with us through Tuesday and then depart for

Chichicastenango to work with Dr. Lisa Dunham and Dr. Josefina Lux at Clinica Caris. Before he was done, Dr. Alvillar treated more than 100 patients.

Tuesday was another big day with twenty-one cases on tap and proved to be another lengthy day. Several of our GYN patients required multiple procedures and it wasn't uncommon for a single case to last 2-3 hours. However, our general surgeons completed fifteen cases for the second day in a row and simply churned out the patients and brought joy and relief to both patient and family.

Despite the fatigue and lateness of the hour, we enjoyed a brief devotional period with singing led by Greg Palmer. Greg has been conducting worship workshops for many years and is an outstanding song leader and one of our team members, not accustomed to acappella singing, was simply enthralled after hearing us sing "The Greatest Commands." In her words, "that wasn't just singing, it was an experience."

We went to bed that night tired and grateful, grateful for an outstanding day and for the fact that we only had sixteen patients scheduled for surgery on Wednesday.

Our breakfast crowd on Wednesday was a little slower coming to the dining room, but most were present in time for our morning devotional period. We spent a brief period each morning looking at Micah 6:8 and contemplating a different portion of that verse.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Our sixteen surgeries scheduled for Wednesday went extremely well and by 4:00 our OR rooms were empty and we were able to send a few team members to the cocoa farm. It was nice to see folks relaxing on the patio, a well deserved rest.

We found a new sterilization protégé, Brenda Grant, from Richmond, Virginia. She would say she simply washed silverware all week, but it was much more than that. We also converted a real estate developer, Glenn McGehee, into a circulating nurse and he did an outstanding job and hopes to return in October. Glenn is the son-in-law of Fran Sutton, one of our RN's and a board member.

Mario Rosas and Leslie Doke with a young patient.



Thursday is typically a light day for surgery, but another sixteen cases were scheduled, though many of them were of the lumps, bumps and biopsy variety. We did have several small children scheduled for hernia repair and they were first up that morning. By 3:00 we pretty much done and sixteen team members made a trip to Xejuyup for a visit to the waterfall.



Final count, 85 patients and more than 100 procedures.

End result... God was glorified and we were inspired!