

Health Talents International January Surgical Clinic Jan 12-19, 2019

Team Participants: Surgeons: Tommy Hatchett, Roger Knowlton, Stewart Lowry, Steven Scarcliff, Scott Smith, Gregory Thompson, Lia Wrenn, Sean Wrenn; Anesthesia: Lawrence Freund, Ken Beach, Laurie Butler, Lisa Richard; Physician: Kris Roberts; Surgical PA: Todd DeCarlis; Nurses: Kathy Anderson, Lauren Anderson, Erin Anderson, Barbara Burg, Lisa Duke, Ethan Kay, Jenny Lawler, Nikki Luckett, Christine Martin, Caitlyn Martin, Aaron Redelsperger, Chelsea Rehak, Gail Sheridan, Kelly Smith, Erika Stanley, Jane Todd, Ann Stowe, Kat Taylor, Jenni Whitefield, Esther Young; Surgical Techs: Ashley Card, Tamika Reese-Lopez; PT Asst: Emily Kay; Translators: Alice Bush, Kathlyn Chan, Rachel Finney, Lucy Ely Pagan, Rita Sills; Sterilization: Eddie Forren, Cary Sills, Paul Vandekamp; Caregivers: Tami Beach, Donna Dengel, Sydney Forren, Tina Forren, Peter Goodspeed, Bennett Lowry, Alena Lowry, Annika Roberts, Amery Roberts, Lenaya Roberts, Karlyn Roberts, Tasha Roberts, Carmen Smith, Emily Smith, Bailey Whitefield; Team Leader & Trip Chaplain: Rick Harper

Warm hearts, warm temps and a warmer welcome were waiting on us in Guatemala.

Our January 2019 team consisted of ten Canadians, four from Vermont and six from Montana, all enjoying a reprieve from snow. One from Pennsylvania, three Ohioans and nine Virginians rounded out those who would return to snowy conditions at the conclusion of our week together. (Our Vermont contingency left temps of 77 degrees and were greeted by a temperature of -23 when they finally reached Burlington, a 100-degree swing.) Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas were all represented. Travelers from two countries and fourteen states traveled to Guatemala to work with the Health Talents ministry team.

Our flights were mostly on time, only one person's luggage was lost and one traveler, Laurie Butler, missed her flight due to a missed connection. Not bad for airline travel in the era of airline consolidation. Our bus travel was uneventful, we arrived in Montellano around 5 PM and began the process of seeing patients, sorting supplies and readying equipment for surgery on Sunday.

We inaugurated some new equipment this trip, you might call it a dedication. Fifty new hospital beds were purchased in 2018, along with four new patient gurneys. Each one bearing a brass plaque, each plaque telling a story, each story holding a memory and each memory a treasure.

Pictures were taken of the first patient assigned to each bed or gurney, and in coming days the donors will receive a copy of the photo, a photo of their plaque and patient details complete with the patients' signature or mark. Any time a patient signs with their mark, my feelings turn bittersweet.

Sweet at the simplicity, especially when the mark is from a child, sadness when it is an older patient unable to sign their name, sadness knowing they have not experienced the joy of reading God' word.



(Nikki and Jenni doing what many of our patients cannot...
read from their Bible or a devotional book.)

Saturday was a long day of travel and sleep came easy. We awoke to the sound of chirping birds and the patting of tortillas. Breakfast was out by 7, two hours later than Drs. Roger Knowlton and Steven Scarcliff. They aren't the only early risers, but few can beat them...and the coffee is always waiting.

Following worship that morning, Dr. Walter provided us with an orientation, then it was time for lunch. We began the day with twelve patients on the schedule, though we knew it unlikely we'd get to everyone before supper at 7. Sure enough, we finished the day with three completed GYN surgeries and seven general cases. We would do multiple thyroid cases this week, one of Dr. Scott Smith's areas of expertise, and each case takes 1.5-4 hours.

We had three mother/daughter nurse combos on this trip and ten other family combinations; representing one of the unique features of a Health Talents trip. Families serving together! Surgeon/daughter, surgeon/son, surgeon/wife, nurse/son, nurse/daughter, nurse/wife and one entire family of six.

Our devotionals for the week involved four concepts to weave into your daily life. Treat prayer as sacred, the church as priceless, yourself as holy and others as worthy. Sunday through Wednesday we discussed these topics and considered how our lives would change and others would see us if we put these concepts into practice.

Monday would find us caring for five GYN and thirteen general patients; Tuesday with seven GYN and eleven general cases. Both days were long and though our patients did fine, our 4-midnight shift nurses in the recovery room needed some extra assistance with patients coming out later in the day. Team members assigned to other shifts jumped in to provide assistance and smooth out the rough patches with teamwork.

Veteran team member and nurse practitioner, Kathy Anderson, came with her two daughters, Erin and Lauren, both RN's. Kathy went out each day on mobile clinics, while Erin and Lauren worked in recovery, mostly working the midnight shift. Kathy and Erin began coming while Erin was still in high school, continued though college and nursing school as their schedule allowed and Lauren began coming a few years later.

(Heading to Guatemala pose, followed by a bedside photo.)



One GYN and ten general cases were slated for Thursday and we finished the week with seventy surgeries.

We sent a group to the chocolate farm on Thursday afternoon and began the mental process of transitioning back to the US. For some, that trip began Friday and others on Saturday, Sunday or Monday. The warmth of friendship and service would serve us well as many were returning to blizzard conditions. And the laughter from the journal thoughts shared by writer, interpreter and storyteller extraordinaire, Rachel Finney, are always good for a good belly warming laugh. (See below)

Guate 2019

I haven't had much time to stay in touch with family and friends this week, so I've decided to write them all a group letter and just send it when I get back. I'd like to share it with you all tonight.

Dear family and friends,

It's been a lovely week. I'm tired and sweaty but very happy. I wanted to write you and give you a taste of how beautiful and meaningful life is here at Clínica Ezell. I'll start with my homemade short Spanish medical dictionary that I've used over and over this week, especially during consults. This list pretty much sums up all you need to know in order to survive here as an interpreter.

And the first 3 most frequently employed entries are:

- Hernia, hernia, hernia

Followed closely by...

- Testículo, testículo, escroto

Then you have...

- Ano, recto, hemorroides

And the occasional...

- Tiroides

(Then you just repeat that for at least 6 hours a day, 5 days in a row.)

Another part of my week has been spent trying to learn how to poop properly. I've repeated the rules over and over again to the patients in the colorectal consults and have tried to commit them to memory myself. Rule 1. Fiber, fiber, fiber; 2. Don't sit on the toilet for too long; 3. Don't strain; 4. Your poop should not be like rocks but it shouldn't be like sand either; it shouldn't just run through you but you don't wanna get all stopped up; you shouldn't take longer than 2-3 minutes to do your business...Oh my word, It's so much to remember. I must have been doing it wrong my whole life...the stress is making me constipated...Maybe there's a brochure online somewhere? "Pooping for dummies"?

In other news, I've been collecting some unusual phrases that I've never used in Spanish or heard used, in any language, for that matter. Some of these are doctor to patient statements and some of them are patient to doctor. The order doesn't really matter. They are all quite unique.

1. You have a tennis ball in your rectum. No wait...make that a grapefruit.
2. I feel like a piece of fish left in the refrigerator. (said the patient on the OR table after I rushed in breathless to see how I could help)
3. Sorry, but we've temporarily mislaid your extracted ovarian cyst and can't show it to you right now. In addition to having teeth and hair, it seems to have sprouted legs and escaped on foot from the clinic.
4. We are happy to tell you that we have drained an entire chocolate fondue fountain from the lump in front of your thyroid.
5. Your discharge smells like a fish.

And my all-time personal favorite,

6. Your anus has become a tube sock turned inside out. The doctor says he is going to cut off the cuff and stuff the rest back in. No, I don't know how that works either.

Finally, I'll just close with a short anecdote from a general surgery consult. I've entitled this one, very simply: "The mysterious número 3"

"I've got 2 hernias!" the patient tells me excitedly, "one on each side! One up high and one down low."

"Ok," I tell the patient calmly, "the doctor will examine you and check them both. Let's see what he thinks."

"I can only find one hernia," the doctor looks up at me after the exam. "We can fix that one tomorrow. There is nothing on the other side."

"But there is!" the patient insists, "I can feel it myself!" I relay this information to the doctor.

"No, no," the doctor patiently repeats, "there is no hernia on the other side. I can't feel anything there." We go on and explain the surgery to the patient, telling him the doctor will operate tomorrow.

“But what are you going to do about my third testicle?!!” the patient suddenly explodes in exasperation.

“Um....Perdón?” I say. “Repite, por favor, señor?”

“Sí, sí,” the patient is adamant, “hay 2 pegaditos y uno al lado--there are 2 stuck together and one is off to the side!” I translate this last bit and glance over at the doctor. He looks about as shocked as I feel. I notice the doctor’s eyebrows have begun to move independently of one another. When one goes up, the other goes down. Up, down, up, down. There is a bit of a pause... “I’m going to consult with my colleague,” the doctor blurts out...and abruptly bolts for the door. The Guatemalan nurse and I sit silently with Señor Tripod in the exam room, waiting for their return.

Doctor #2 comes in, apparently already apprised of the situation. “I need a flashlight,” he says, and we all start scrambling to find one. None are readily available. “That’s ok,” he says, “I’ll just use the flashlight on my cell phone.” “No, no! Don’t do it, don’t do it!” we are all groaning. But the lights are out and there’s a cell phone due south (where the sun don’t shine) and bingo! Hydrocile, it is! We all breathe a sigh of relief, especially the patient as he realizes he is going to get the 2 for 1 special on repairs of lumps below the belt.

Well, dear family and friends, these are my postcards from the edge...of the jungle.

Remember to follow the PPP (proper pooping procedure) and to always carry plenty of disposable alcohol wipes when you travel. You never know when you, or your cell phone, might need one!

Y’all be careful travelling home. Hope to see you all next year! Abrazos! (hugs!)

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If you made it this far, your eyes may be too filled with tears to read further. I’ll just add that January 2019 is now history and more importantly a wonderful memory for our team and patients!

