

Health Talents International
Guatemala Eye/Ortho Surgery Clinic
March 12-19, 2011

Trip Report

Participants: Drs. Lee Coleman, Ophthalmologist; David Gilliam, Orthopedist; Roy Berenholtz, Anesthesiologist; and Michael Brown, Optometrist; Nurse Practitioner Bethany Massey; RNs Glenn Berkey, Neva Berkey, and Connie Campbell; Lipscomb Nursing Students Amber Markham and Preston Deatheridge; Surgical Assistant Richard Yates; Med Tech Ann Grantham; Emergency Room Tech Mitchell Myers; Amy Coleman, Madeline Coleman, Walker Coleman, Vanessa Gilliam, Whitney Gilliam, Daniel Brown, David Brown; LU Student Group Dr. Alan Bradshaw, Seun Adeleye, Amanda Bowers, Kenneth Coca, Kat Davis, Julia Denney, Caroline Eubanks, Cameron Gilliam, Jeremy Glass, Andres Gonzalez (Translator), Stephen Gragg, Danielle Kelvas, Chaslynn McAvoy, Sam McReynolds, Joe Muchmore, Nichole Muszynski, Jay Pannell, Sarah Parish, Kayla Raines, Michelle Roberts, Wes Rogers, Allison Scott, Leah Scruggs, Mollie Watson, and Stephanie White; Julie Wheelley and Marie Agee, Team Leaders.

Saturday, March 12: The team arrived on four different flights, and everyone made it except for two people. Connie Campbell and Jeremy Glass were delayed because Continental had accidentally brought the wrong plane to their initial boarding site, only to discover their error after everyone had boarded. All had to deplane and the proper plane brought up. That caused just enough delay so that, though our plane to Guatemala was still at the gate in Houston, they arrived to find their seats had been given away and the door to the jetway closed! Banging on the door didn't help! They finally arrived in Guatemala about 9 pm and had to spend the night in a hotel and ride up with Dr. Walter on Sunday morning. Oh, the joys of air travel.

The doctors began pre-op exams soon after arriving at Clinic Ezell. As a way of involving the students, we created a "Patient Advocacy" program that paired a Lipscomb student with a Guatemalan patient. We explained to both students and patients that the pairing would enable them the opportunity to get to know each other, and the student would accompany them to their pre-op exam and later in the week on to surgery and recovery, when possible. Everyone seemed enthusiastic about the program, and the waiting room was soon abuzz with conversations as they all attempted to communicate with each other.

Lipscomb student, Cameron Gilliam, coordinated the devotionals for the week and announced that the theme would be "Stories" because everyone has marvelous faith stories of how God has dramatically affected their lives. He said he had asked several different people to share those stories with us throughout the week.

Sunday, March 13: Carlos preached in both English and Spanish at church this morning and did a good job of it. Later we had our typical meeting universal precautions, the schedule for the week, etc. We stressed that due to efforts to maintain a strong professional integrity to the work and out of respect for our patients, team members would be permitted to do only those things medically that they were licensed to do in the United States. Cataract surgeries finally began after lunch, and by the time he went to bed, Dr. Lee had removed eleven of them! That was a long day for sure. Drs. Gilliam and Berenholtz had no patients scheduled for Sunday except for a pain block for back pain.

Monday, March 14: Today the team went in several different directions from eye and ortho surgery to eye screenings in the school across the road to mobile clinics to wall painting and pill counting! Dr. David's cases were mainly removing ganglionic cysts and tumors, while Dr. Lee continued with removing cataracts.

The patient advocacy program worked especially well in at least one case. Leah Scruggs and Stephanie White double-teamed a pretty 19-yr-old young woman named Leidy (pronounced Lady). They developed a very real connection with Leidy as she waited for surgery. They talked, listened to music and shared their stories with each other...and on Monday it was surgery day. Leah sat with Leidy as she waited her turn and then both she and Stephanie went with her into the operating room and stayed with her as she recovered. It was a beautiful thing to witness as it was clear that Leidy was greatly comforted by their presence. Her surgery was not major (a cyst removal from her arm), but going thru even minor surgery with no family members present and in an atmosphere foreign to her with no ability to speak the language of the people operating on you can be very stressful.

By the end of the day, Lee had removed 15 cataracts and David had performed 5 ortho cases.

Tuesday, March 15: The principal of the school invited the Lipscomb students to come to the school at 7:30 a.m. to conduct their morning devotional. When we arrived, we saw all the students lined up in orderly rows in front of the school awaiting us. I'd NEVER seen them so orderly! Dr. Alan Bradshaw and some of the students led some Spanish and English songs, and the ones with hand motions were the favorites! After the closing prayer, the LU students stayed on to conduct more eye screenings.

When the students completed the daily screenings, they proceeded to deliver water filters to various other schools in the area. They were accompanied by HTI health promoters Oscar and Ivan, who gave instructions to both teachers and students on the correct use of them.

Two of the female patients had tumors on the bottom of their feet. One was actually in the arch of the foot. As Dr. David prepared to send that lump to a lab for pathology examination, he explained that though this lump appeared to be nothing more than an encapsulation of a foreign body that had gotten into her foot, he couldn't be certain that it wasn't something more serious.

The big surgery deal of the day was when Dr. David performed the first ever knee scope at Clinica Ezell! We were all excited because this gives us one more exceedingly useful tool in our medical arsenal. The patient that he used the scope on had come because the cyst on the side of her knee that she had had removed at Clinica Ezell last June had returned. David thought perhaps there was a torn meniscus, but the scope enabled him to see that that was not the case. Again, because of the scope, he was able to determine exactly where the cyst was attached and carefully closed the opening to hopefully prevent another recurrence.

Another ortho patient was a woman who had arrived in a wheel chair, unable to walk. She actually hadn't been able to walk for the past 3-4 months due to painful scar tissue build-up from previous knee surgery. Because she had a cardiac issue that had potential surgical risks, Dr. Roy, the anesthesiologist, simply numbed up her leg really, really well and Dr. David manipulated it extensively to break up the scar tissue. Their efforts worked because the next morning with support from crutches, she was up walking...and beaming!

The eye surgeries all went well, for which we are always grateful. Dr. Lee told me that as he examined one elderly woman, he saw that she had had one eye already worked on, and it was clear as a bell with the new lens. He immediately felt a pang of insecurity, wondering if he would be able to do as good a job as that other surgeon had done. That lasted only for a moment, though, as his eyes scanned further down her record and excitedly said to himself, "**Hey, I did that first surgery!**" He felt reassured that he was up to the job!

The day's surgery totals were 10 cataracts removed and 4 ortho cases.

Wednesday, March 16: The day began again with students going to the school for more eye screenings and water filter deliveries then more wall painting in the afternoon.

A funny thing happened during post-op rounds this morning. Mike was having trouble removing the tape from one man because it had gotten tangled up in his long eyebrows. As Mike pulled and tugged as gently as he could, the man lay there wincing. Finally, Mike worked it loose and pulled it off, and I impulsively said, "Hallelujah!" The man, who spoke no English, immediately responded with, "Amen!" We all shared a good laugh.

On Mike's list of patients waiting to be seen was a "96-year-old" woman. I wondered aloud if she were really 96 because I'd never seen anyone that old at the clinic. I looked around and picked out the oldest-looking woman there and asked her if I could look at her chart. She handed it to me, and I saw that it indeed said she was 96, so I asked her: "Are you *really* 96 years old?" "No," she yelled back at me indignantly! "I'm only 86!" (Even in Guatemala we don't want to be 1 day older than we really are!)

Thursday, March 17: Five more surgeries kept Dr. Lee busy half the day, while the students did more of what they'd been doing all week. In addition to their already busy schedule, they added a VBS at one of the schools they'd visited earlier in the week. At noon when he finished, most of the team went for a trip through the Guatemalan countryside over to a little community by the side of Lake Atitlan for lunch and a bit of a break. We ended our day with a very moving evening of reflection with the entire group circled around the fountain underneath a starry sky and a brilliant perigee moon.

The final tally for the week was 52 eye surgeries and 12 ortho surgeries...thankfully with no serious problems at all. The next morning we left for Antigua with our dirty clothes and precious memories of a week spent serving God by serving others. We were all grateful for having had the opportunity to do so.



Dr. Mike Brown & Danny doing pre-op exam.



Lipscomb University nursing student Amber Markham prepping patient for eye surgery.



Dr. Lee Coleman in action with able student help.



Dr. David Gilliam removing a tumor on a foot.



Lipscomb professor Dr. Alan Bradshaw leading devo at the school with help from translator, LU student Andres Gonzalez.



Lipscomb student group after water filter presentation.



Patient Advocates Leah Scruggs & Stephanie White With their patient, Leidy, after surgery.



Lipscomb students hard at work painting the bodega.