

**24<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NICARAGUA MOBILE MEDICAL/DENTAL CLINIC**  
**January 25-31, 2018**  
**Health Talents International**

**Team Participants:** Alan Boyd, MD; David Weed, MD; Marilyn Cooper-Jenkins, DDS; Maegan Rogers, RPH; Don Sullivan, RPH; Joyce Anthony, Dental Hygienist; Chaplain Ramiro Alvarez; Translators Steve Fox and Marcie Rodriguez; Compassionate Caregivers Rachel Anthony, Suzi Fox, Tony and Carole McBride; Sharon Midgett; Larry and Claire Owens; Connie Pyles; Robert Taylor; Donna Voigt; and team leader Marie Agee.

I learned in Houston that Gary Tabor was going to be unable to join us due to an unfortunate accident in his yard where he injured his knee severely. That immediately created a minor crisis because Gary is always one of our drivers. We all agreed to give it some prayer time, knowing the Lord would make the answer clear. Then Ramiro Alvarez appeared. Knowing he was from Guatemala City (although he has been in Nashville the last 20+ years) and had likely learned to drive there, I asked him if he had his driver's license with him, and he answered in the affirmative. I next asked if he knew how to drive a stick shift vehicle. Again, the answer was yes. So then I asked him the all-important question: Would you be willing to drive one of the vans? He immediately agreed. Problem solved. God is good.

Upon entry into Nicaragua, all went as it was supposed to. As has proven typical, our official approval to conduct medical clinics there came thru only four hours before our arrival, despite the fact that we had begun working on the process way back in September. Regardless, it is also a relief to know the system worked yet again.

**Nuevo Horizonte/Plywood Iglesia de Cristo:** As we exited our vehicles upon arrival, we knew they were ready for us because of the large crowd of people waiting and the large "welcome" sign (in English) that the preacher, Elvis Cruz, had prominently displayed for us on the front wall of the church. The dentists this year worked out of a brand new house next door to the clinic that was loaned out for our use. The owner lives in the States and has built it for his ultimate return to Nicaragua. It was a much better facility that the dentists had ever had there before, with plenty of natural light and breezes to cool them. The crowning touch was a concrete floor...they were not working in the dirt again!

Dental hygienist Joyce Anthony was with us this year, and we were surprised that more people wanted their teeth cleaned than teeth pulled! We took that to mean that the level of dental education was increasing in the area. We all hope Joyce will keep coming back!

This is the dry season in Nicaragua, so as usual everything was very dusty. Because of that, we had lots of patients with allergies, eczema, skin fungus and dandruff. Arthritic pain cases were many as were upper respiratory infections and worms. One young boy about 10 walked in alone to the pharmacy asking for worm medicine. You know he must be well acquainted with worms and how to get rid of them for him to take that kind of initiative.

All the while we were seeing patients, multiple local evangelists were talking with people in the church yard. In the mid-afternoon we had a baptism of an older woman who made her public confession of faith in front of Nicaraguans and gringos alike. Unlike our very formal baptisms here with long white robes, people are often baptized in whatever they have on. They are simply handed a towel to dry off afterwards.

One of the church families lived in the yard behind the clinic, and their daughter had a pet monkey, who was quite the charmer. Several of us got to hold him for a bit. He was very friendly and affectionate. They also had a baby parrot that climbed from finger to finger. These are the kinds of things we don't usually see in our neighborhoods back home.

We ended the day here with having been the compassionate hands of Jesus for 393 patients.

**Tipitapa Centro:** The church here is always joy to go to. Their church building is large and spacious and paid for entirely by their own congregation with NO outside money from the States at all. The church leaders are quite proud of that

fact...as they should be. Their building is located near La Villa, so we are serving the same poverty-stricken population but in a better facility. At La Villa we were actually outside with merely a tarp to protect us from the sun. The doctors treated patients with many of the same ailments as those from the day before. One woman came for treatment of some minor ailments as she was still recovering from having been hit by a car a few weeks before. Again, in the afternoon we were blessed to witness another baptism. By the end of the day, 382 patients had passed through.

**Worship at Rene Polanco and R&R:** We left early for church to allow time for a brief visit to view the Nicaraguan National Palace where their president lives and the cathedral that had been badly in the major earthquake in 1976, I believe. The guards were very nice and accommodating, and one of them even took our group photograph in front of a bank of bougainvillea.

It is a joy to worship at Rene Polanco as we renew friendship among the members there. Ramiro Alvarez preached in both Spanish and English and did an amazing job, as he slipped effortlessly from one language to the other effortlessly. Again, there was a baptism during the service. The crowd at church was larger than I've ever seen it. Many chairs were added in the aisles. They are clearly growing in numbers.

After lunch at TipTop Chicken, we drove to the Masaya market then went to Pizza Hut for dinner. It was a rewarding, fun, and relaxing day all the way around.

**Loma Alegre:** This was our first visit to this church, located southwest of Managua rather than north where we typically go. It took us longer to get there than we had anticipated, so next year we will spend the night in one of the small coastal hotels so we can begin clinic in the day. The church has 3 men members, 63 women members and 120 children. The preacher Oscar is a volunteer and lives in Managua. He drives out to Loma Alegre a couple of times a week with his family and spends the night in the church building in order to minister to them. Loma Alegre is a tiny village made up of campesinos (farm workers) and is desperately poor. We saw no obese people here. Almost everyone here works in the sugar cane fields. Houses are simply made with very few comforts. Again, because it is the dry season, dust and dirt were everywhere. And because it is very near the Pacific Ocean, the wind blows all the time. Recently during a particularly violent storm, the wind was strong enough to blow down and destroy the children's classroom, a primitive structure made of tree trunks and thatch.

It was here that Dr. David Weed reported seeing his first ever severely autistic child, a non-verbal 7-year-old boy being raised by his single mother because his father left when it was clear there was something wrong with his son. The child had never been diagnosed, but his symptoms made clear his condition. The mother works in the sugarcane fields for six months out of the year when work is available. According to the numbers she gave him, she makes about \$75/month. The other six months she has to beg for food for herself and her son. Ramiro, David, Steve and Sharon prayed for her afterwards, and through her tears she seemed deeply grateful to them.

Three young men came for physical therapy. They spend all day using machetes to cut sugar cane and have developed what is known as Popeye arms, where their forearms become unusually large and painful from overuse.

During the day, there were two river baptisms: Ana Maria (a young mother with a baby) and Enrique (19-yr-old). River baptisms are special to me. In this case, actually getting to the river was quite a challenge. The path was very steep and rocky, and according to Carole McBride's Fitbit, was the equivalent of 12 flights of stairs each way! Because of these baptisms, the church member count is now 4 men, 64 women and 121 children!

Because of our late arrival, we only treated 331 people here. Next year we will see many more.

**Cofradia Iglesia de Cristo:** This was our sixth year to hold clinic here and it is always well organized. It is located north of Managua. The church leadership as well as the patients are always quick to show their appreciation for our visit. Again, the dry, dusty season has caused many to suffer from the same ailments we had seen earlier. The most unusual patient we had was a young man who was severely obese at 395 pounds on his small frame. He could barely walk. By the end of the day, we had treated 436 people.

Our total patient number for the four days was 1,542. We could never have seen this many patients without the capable and willing help of our wonderful Nicaraguan counterparts. Drs. Juliana Mena (Jose Garcia's wife), Dr. Eduardo Ortega and Dr. Lopez were a vital part of the medical team as were Dr. Julie Garcia Mena (Jose's daughter) and her team to the dental team. It was an amazing effort by all...and all for the glory of God!



Morning devo at Nuevo Horizonte



Nuevo Horizonte Iglesia de Cristo



Dr. Alan looking for...??



Busy pharmacy at Tipitapa Centro



Loma Alegre Iglesia de Cristo



Ana Maria at her baptism



Neighbor monkey at Nuevo Horizonte



Tired team at the Pacific Coast