

Health Talents International, Inc.  
Nicaragua Mobile Medical Clinic  
January 26-31, 2012

Trip Report

Team Members: Drs. Alan Boyd, Charles Jarrett, and David Weed; Pharmacists Tony McBride and Larry Owens; Med Tech Ann Grantham; Speech Pathologist Judy Kyker; Translator Steve Fox; Compassionate Caregivers Suzi Fox, Shike Keene, Carole McBride, Valerie McGraw, Grace McIntyre, Claire Owens, Gary Tabor, Robert Taylor, Jean Walton; Team Leader Marie Agee

Five of the team members were from Birmingham, and our trip got started off with a cancelled flight due to bad weather in Houston. That was a good/bad scenario. Bad because we weren't able to travel with the team...good because we didn't have to get up well before dawn to be at the airport by 5 am! We did have an uneventful flight later, at a much more comfortable time of day. The other team members arrived on schedule and without incident.

We arrived to find that the immigration procedures had changed in Managua since last year. X-ray screening equipment was now in place to x-ray every bag brought into Nicaragua. Knowing that I was toting a good many dental instruments and meds, I knew I would be stopped, so I sent everyone else ahead of me. They passed through easily. Sure enough, when my bag went through I was ushered over to the side. I wasn't worried because Jose Garcia, our man in Nicaragua, and I had worked diligently to get prior approval of our meds and equipment...and I had my copies with me. To make a very long story short, despite my protestations of having authorization, the man in charge kept saying that Health Talents was not on his list of approved organizations. We went back and forth for any hour, even going to find Jose at one point who presented his copy of the "approval" status. It did no good. Finally, another agent brought over yet another piece of paper, showed it to my guy, who then showed it to me. Sure enough... we were "on the list" after all! As I was loading things back into the suitcase, he asked me, "How do you say 'dolor de cabeza' in English?" I said, "You have a headache?" And I thought, "Son, you ARE a headache to me!" It was midnight when we finally arrived at the hotel.

Nuevo Horizonte clinic: Upon arriving at the clinic site, I saw many faces I recognized, including the preachers: Francisco Cajina, Marvin, and Elvis (yes, Elvis!). They had the clinic all set up and ready to go. They had even built a new structure to house the dental clinic, complete with heavy plastic wrapped around to serve as walls. The preachers opened the clinic with a devotional and ended by leading a few songs. Such a joy to hear their wonderful, enthusiastic voices as they sang praises to the Father.

Clara, the young woman I'd met last year who had just been diagnosed with lupus, was there again. She had gained a good bit of weight since last year, most likely from the medicine she was taking. She again needed help getting the meds she needed, and, thankfully, we were able to help her.

To give you an idea of just how flexible and creative our doctors are, I will share what Dr. Charles Jarrett did. His elderly female patient had come in complaining about her wrist. She had fallen a few days before, so her wrist was now slightly swollen and sore. Charles suspected she had a hairline crack in the bone. Since we had no splinting or casting material with us, Charles punted. He used tongue depressors to stabilize her wrist, covered the whole area with 2x2" gauze from the dental clinic, then covered the whole thing with...duct tape! Hey, it worked! She left smiling.

Jose and I had to take the vitamins we'd brought to the Ministry of Health so they could see that the bottles were still sealed. We drove all the way across town to get there only to find the office closed. We then went to the office of Marielos, the woman who initially approves documents that Jose works with regularly, to let her know we tried. There we met Dr. Rodolfo Vargas, an endocrinologist from Brookwood Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, who has his own non-profit that takes medical doctors to Nicaragua. I have heard of him for years, so it was good to meet him, especially in Nicaragua. He is a native Nicaraguan himself.

When we returned to the clinic, I learned that the 23-year-old young man who'd been electrocuted had come by. Dr. David Weed saw him and later shared some details with me. It seems he'd been working on a roof when he lost his balance. As he tried to catch himself, he grabbed onto the first thing he saw, which was a power line. He has lost both arms from just below the elbows and down. The current exited through his genitals, so he has to wear a catheter now that is continually getting infected. David and Gary Tabor are going to make contact with a urologist in Texas to see what possible help we could get to aid this young man in living life after such a tragedy. David also determined what medicines might help him and told him we would provide them.

We worked until almost dark, then headed back to our hotel. Total patient count for the day was 352.

Rene Polanco Iglesia de Cristo: As we were piling into the van to leave for clinic, Jose called to tell me that there were already 400 people lined up and waiting for us! Wow, something had changed. The last two years at Rene Polanco had seen vastly reduced numbers from previous years. When we arrived, we were pleased to see many improvements to the clinic facility due to the government's new requirements.

After the devotional, things began popping. The pharmacy was staffed with two pharmacists (Larry Owens and Tony McBride) and three helpers. They were all needed as at any given time throughout the day there were at least 12-15 people waiting patiently in line to get their prescriptions filled.

Again, I saw many people I knew from previous years. And, yes, the polka-dotted lady was there once again to see her personal dermatologist, Dr. Alan Boyd. The dental clinic was running smoothly with the dental instruments that had been donated by Dr. Mark Whitefield.

With our experienced team, things ran very smoothly all day. The total patient count was 575! Jose was SO excited!

Worship at Rene Polanco: The auditorium was filled to the max on Sunday morning with many, many people I did not know. The church is obviously growing. Some of it is a result of their Saturday morning breakfast program, sponsored by the Waterview Church of Christ in Richardson, Texas, which serves the many poor children in the neighborhood. Currently, they are feeding 65 children each week. Besides providing breakfast, the program includes hygiene and nutrition lessons, as well as a Bible story. The parents of the children are asked to volunteer from time to time. Many of these families are adding to the growth of the church there as Jose said that every month now he is baptizing one or two members of the families of the children!

Cofradía clinic: Cofradía is not very far from the airport, but it is a very rural community where large agricultural farms are located. The members of this community work on these farms. There is a good-sized church located here in a 5-sided building with a very high, pointed roof. It made a great setting for the clinic. There is no health center anywhere near this place, however, so the church leaders were

delighted we were there! The people looked pretty healthy, though, but I suppose it is because they live off the land.

The most major problem today was that the Guatemalan dentist broke the root off of a tooth he was trying to pull. He wasn't able to retrieve it, so Julie, Jose's daughter who is in her last year of dental school, took the girl to a local oral surgeon who used to work with us some. Gary Tabor drove them, and though it took most of the afternoon, the oral surgeon was able to retrieve the root tip. It was so long it had penetrated her sinus cavity.

Jose and I had to return to the Ministry of Health once more. It turns out that the reason we thought the office was closed on Friday was that it had moved. There was just no sign telling where they'd move to. On this day we were saved by an 8-yr-old girl who saw us trying to get in. She said, "No, they're over here now." And led us to the right place. Sigh...

The final count for Cofradía was 375. This made a grand total for this trip of 1,302.

We shared dinner that evening with our Nicaraguan team members. Robert Taylor delivered the final devo with translational by Juan, Jose's brother. Robert called what we were doing as being "Brokers of Hope." It was a great ending to a great week. To God be the Glory!





