

HEALTH TALENTS INTERNATIONAL
CLINICA EZELL GYN/GENERAL SURGERY CLINIC
September 4-11, 2010

Trip Report

Participants: General surgeons Stewart Lowry & Mike Trimble; Pediatric Urologist Gerald Jerkins; Internist Waheed Zehri; GYNs Lisa Buckingham, Bob Elder, Carolyn Harrington, and Kristen Sorensen; Anesthesiologists David Craig and Al Jones; CRNAs Rachel Turner and Jack Tipton; SRNA Chris Garrett; Resident Kent Brantly; RNs Amber Brantly, Cari Fowler, Janine Gorline, Dwayne Valentine, Barb Burg, Alice Bush, Barbara Jones, Lauren Moore, Irene De Soto, Mary Trimble, and Frank Harden; Pharmacist Tony McBride; Physical Therapist Suzanne Elder; PT Asst Molly Smith; Physician's Asst student, Sarah Watkins; Photographer Carl Agee; Sterilization Alfred Anderson, Guy Martin, and Mark Smith; Circulation tech Kelly Milam; Translators Kathy Buckingham, Rosanna Gutierrez-Molina, Dianne Martin and Robert Murray; Trip Chaplain Cary Hadley; Compassionate Caregivers Cindi Lemmons, Carole McBride, Emily McCreary and Beverly Milam; Infant Ruby Brantly; Team Leader Marie Agee.

Although we'd been warned ahead of time that a bridge was out on the coastal highway near Clinica Ezell that might affect our travel, the team arrived in Guatemala full of excitement and enthusiasm for the week ahead. We immediately had a hint of what we were in for. The bus was thirty minutes late picking us up. The reason: mudslides on the road coming out of Antigua. It finally arrived, and we got loaded up and started out. About halfway to the clinic, we caught up with the backed up traffic from the missing bridge. We crept along for what seemed like an eternity until we came upon a detour where only cars were being allowed to pass. Amazingly, after our driver's helper talked with the policeman on guard telling him that we were a medical team, he waved us through. The next thirty minutes proved why buses and trucks were not allowed on it. The road was a narrow dirt road that wound around thru a community, crossed a long bridge over the raging river then made a right turn that put us back out on the highway...on the OTHER side of the missing bridge. Traveling that road was quite an adventure! Although we were never in danger, the muddy road condition provided us with a few starts and gasps along the way. We ultimately arrived at the clinic only 4-1/2 hours after we started, which wasn't too bad considering it normally takes 3 hours.

Sunday was its normal chaotic day as we struggled to come together as a team. It is always a challenge for the surgeons to schedule the exact number of patients on a given day. They didn't succeed today, and we had to move some until tomorrow, and the last patient still didn't come off the table until 10 pm. We held our initial "get acquainted" session without them.

We experienced several crises during the week, but none of them were patient related, thank goodness. On Tuesday morning we had a medical scare involving our Guatemalan physician, Dr. Walter Sierra. He had what turned out to be an acute hypertensive event, which was literally translated to mean his blood pressure was too high, likely aggravated by stress. After spending a couple of days recuperating and starting medication, he seemed fine. The internist on the team, Dr. Waheed Zehri, treated Dr. Walter then covered his clinics those two days.

Late Tuesday afternoon it began to rain...hard. By 7 pm the creek running thru the property was raging and trying its best to get over the bridge. Knowing the ground was already saturated from previous rains, we were all a bit concerned. Sure enough, something happened. The raging water broke the water line that supplies water to the clinic. Carlos, Juan Josue and Francisco sprang into action as soon the water abated. They found the break in the line where it ran parallel to the river and with great determination and effort, managed to repair it by 10 pm. They were our heroes (soaking wet ones!) of the night for sure! We now had water to flush the toilets, but none for showers. On Wednesday morning we discovered there was normal water service to the hospital, but we still didn't have any in

the showers in the dorm. We all agreed that in a group setting it was better to have flushing toilets than showers.

One of our patients during the week was a 7-yr-old girl named Juana. She never smiled even though I and others tried to get her to do so. Turns out she had spina bifida. Nothing much to smile about there. Someone discovered, however, that if you picked her up and put her into the wheelchair that stayed in the ward, she would smile as you pushed her around. The Memphis team, Dr. Gerald Jerkins and his crew plus Dr. Al Jones, collaborated on a plan to get a wheelchair for Juana when they got back home. Dr. Al mentioned the plan to me at breakfast one morning, and I told Al that we had some wheelchairs in the bodega, and I'd check to see if there were any pediatric ones. Later Carole McBride, Carl and I went over to search, and the very first one we found was a child's wheelchair in very good condition. Carl re-attached the legs to it, and he and Carole cleaned it up. Later that morning several gathered around Juana's bed to present it to her. Unsure at first because of all the sudden attention, Juana very quickly realized what she'd been given, and the rest of the day you had to move out of her way as she propelled herself around the ward in that wheelchair, smiling every wheel revolution of the way! That was definitely a highlight of the week.

Another highlight was seeing Baby Domingo, the 2-yr-old who had spent several weeks in Austin, Texas, for repair of a very serious birth defect. With all the neurological surgery he'd had, there was lingering concern about his ability to walk. Domingo cast all that doubt away as he showed us how he could not only stand, but with someone holding his little hands, he took steps! We all shed tears of happiness watching him and reveling in his progress.

We sometimes offer what appears to be a "family surgery special." This time it involved Berta, a 40-something woman who came in for gall bladder surgery. She was the last patient of the day, so it was quite late before she recovered enough to let her family in to see her. The family consisted of her 20-yr-old daughter and 6-yr-old son, Bryan. Next morning when I went down to the hospital to check on how things went during the night, there was little Bryan, sitting in the first patient chair wearing a hospital gown and a bouffant nurses cap. Turns out he was in for hernia repair himself. They all left together the next day, happy and well.

Another gall bladder patient was our own Marta Tobias, the Guatemalan nurse who starts our patient IVs. On the day of her own surgery, there she was dressed in a hospital gown helping Cata start an IV! She is indestructible! I feel sure she will be back in her normal spot when it's time for the October clinic.

There was conflicting information all week about whether the bridge would or would not be prepared in time for our exit on Friday. By Thursday evening we learned that it had been repaired, by the efforts of the Dole Pineapple Company who had a definite commercial interest in getting it open. We decided to leave at 6 a.m. the next morning to give ourselves extra time...just in case. As soon as we left the clinic and drove down to the highway, we saw a huge long line of traffic once more and learned that the bridge had been re-damaged during the night, so it was now closed. By this time we were ourselves in the line of traffic with no easy way out, so we waited. And waited. And waited...all the while evaluating exit options on the phone with Carlos and Baldemar. In the end, we decided to stay put and crept forward a few feet at the time until we reached the detour. Once again we were waved thru. From that point on, we made steady progress and arrived in Antigua at 12:30 p.m., only 6-1/2 hours after we'd left. No one complained, rather we all felt blessed because the short cut to Antigua had been cleared of mudslides and was open to traffic. That saved us a couple *more* hours of travel time. Carlos told me later that the reason we were waved thru onto the detour was that some church members were actually working on the bridge and alerted the police and soldiers that we were coming, so they were watching for us. This time, thankfully, the detour road was in much better condition. God is good.

As I said earlier, there was a lot of excitement and adventure during the week, but all of our 77 patients did very well. That alone makes for a successful clinic. That...and offering up our service to the patients in God's name. Thanks to everyone who offered up prayers on our behalf during the week. God did indeed hear them...and for that we are deeply grateful.



Muddy "river" of road



Almost a smile from little Juana



Bryan ready for surgery



Patient Marta awaiting her turn.



Little Domingo...marching into his future!



September 2010 Surgical Team