

HEALTH TALENTS INTERNATIONAL  
Guatemala Surgical Clinic at Clinica Ezell  
September 8-15, 2007

Trip Report...by Marie Agee

Participants: Gen Surgeons Drs. Benny Cleveland and George Robertson; Gyn Surgeons Drs. Robert Elder, Carolyn Thompson and resident Yvonne Treece; Cardiologist Quinton Dickerson; Anesthesia Drs. David Craig, Will Curtis and Carlos Patiño; Nurses Alice Bush, Alice Caldwell, Tara Crowder, Amy Cupp, Caroline Evans, Elaine Griffin, Laura Simmons, Betsy Keene, and Jean Walton; Surg tech Richard Yates; EMT Cullen Copeland; Pharmacist Debbie Gale; Translators Steve Fox, Debbie Himelrick and Dianne Martin; Dental Hygienist Linda King; Sterilization crew Alfred Anderson and Kelly Milam; General Maintenance Dennis Griffin; Compassionate volunteers Monette Beard, Lynn Himelrick, Sarah Hovis, Beverly Milam, Debbie Derenburger, Abby Verghese, Sarah Watkins, and Marie Agee.

Cyndi Yates, another RN, was supposed to have gone with us, but she instead she contracted a virus and ended up in the hospital! We trust she will be able to go on another trip soon.

Trip Summary: Nine members of the team did not make the Houston flight because of fog in the Houston area. The ones coming from Nashville were actually able to land at the Hobby airport in Houston but not the international one. By car they were probably only an hour away...but not close enough to get there! Then, because Sunday was Guatemala's presidential election day, they were delayed because of staff members needing to vote as well as traffic problems. They finally made it to Clinica Ezell about 3 pm Sunday.

The team members who were there forged on ahead by seeing patients and beginning to operate. We only had one anesthesiologist who had made it, so we ran only one room until the others arrived.

Because of ambition, excitement and a bit of miscommunication, I learned late Sunday night that there were 23 cases scheduled for Monday. Knowing that in all this history of these clinics we had never done that many in one day before, Dr. Lisa Dunham and I encouraged the docs to reconsider the scheduling. By postponing three patients to Monday or Tuesday and eliminating one patient because of high blood sugar, the number came down to 19 in all. Amazingly, they were still able to finish by 7 pm Monday. A typical full day's load is 15-17 patients, with 8-10 being a typical Sunday load. Anything more than that overloads the recovering room.

On Tuesday the doctors removed three dermoid cysts. (They are some gross-looking stuff!) Dr. Bob Elder had an unusual experience with one patient. She was obese, which we rarely see in Guatemala. She had such a thick layer of abdominal fat that he had to send for a different type of retractor!

Alice Bush assumed the role of "head nurse" and was very quickly dubbed "Big Alice" by Elaine Griffin! Alice did a terrific job in staffing the patient ward. She led her team of nurses well using her good sense as well as sense of humor. The nursing staff ranged from some young nurses who had not been out of school very long to a couple who had been retired for many years, with several with current solid working experience in between. They all worked together well and were diligent in looking after all our patients.

This was a special experience for Alice. She had been a missionary nurse on Health Talents' very first mission team back in 1980. Alice lived in the Peten area of Guatemala and operated, with the other team members, HTI's first clinic, Clinica Protalsa. Because of the increasing civil war in Guatemala, it became necessary for the team to evacuate in November 1981. This was her very first trip back since then. When she discovered that she and I were staying in the dorm room designated the "Peten room," she was overcome with emotion as all her memories of the time she spent in the Peten came flooding back. She and I enjoyed walking down Memory Lane throughout the week. By the end of the week, she had resolved that she would be back again and again! Thank you, Alice.

One of our precious little patients was a 4-year-old girl named Juana. She was supposed to have had a cyst removed from her little shoulder, but during the procedure the surgeon discovered that it wasn't that at all, but a hemangioma (blood vessel tumor). Repairing it is beyond our capability at Clinica Ezell, so he stitched her back up.

One patient came all the way from Antigua for her surgery. She was a friend of Dr. Raul, the doctor/preacher in the church there. She had major gynecological surgery but recovered well.

Caroline Evans worked one a night shift. She told the next morning of how early, early that day she witnessed the sweetest thing. A group of men patients, who had already had surgery, had gotten out of their beds and together walked down to the section where a group of women had slept who were awaiting their own surgeries that day. This group of 4-5 men knelt on the floor near these women and prayed a long and impassioned prayer for them. She said she just stood and marveled at the sight of such faith!

My most endearing memory of the week was coming upon Dr. David Craig as he put a year-old baby to sleep. Seated by the anesthesia machine, he cradled him in one arm, held the mask to the baby's little mouth with his other hand, and sang to him a Guatemalan children's song that a 4-year-old girl had taught him on his last trip to Guatemala! It was so wonderful! The baby drifted off to sleep feeling very secure.

Linda King is dental hygienist from Austin, Texas, and a veteran of several HTI trips. She came along to provide in-service education to Dr. Silvia's dental hygienist who is in training. Several people joined Linda's classes and expressed delight at how much they had learned! Linda's congregation supports Baldemar Ruiz, so she was able to spend some time with him on behalf of church as well.

Our designated chaplain was unable to come on the trip at the last minute, so we passed the devotional assignments among several people. The result was a wide variety of thought and encouragement that was just wonderful! Drs. David Craig, Benny Cleveland, George Robertson, as well as minister, Steve Fox, all took turns reminding the group why we were there and how valuable their service was to both God and our patients.

This group was so fun to be with! Overall, they had the best attitude of any group we've ever had, and that is saying a lot because we have had many wonderful teams at Clinica Ezell. We ended up doing 75 surgeries, and all the patients did well. We are once again very thankful to God for both this opportunity and his faithfulness.



L – R Debbie Gale & Alice Bush tend to a patient.



Dr. David Craig cradles the baby.



Sept '07 Surgery Team