

Health Talents International
General/GYN Surgery Clinic
October 5-12, 2013
Trip Report

Participants: *General Surgeon* Dr. Benny Cleveland; *Gyns* Drs. Ana-Maria Gray and Belinda Perez; *Urologists* Drs. Grady Bruce and Shaun Maloney; *Family Practice Emergency* Dr. Steve Namihias; *Medicine* Dr. David Brazzel ; *Anesthesiologists* Drs. Byron Brown and Cindy Brown; *CRNAs* Jeff Cherye and Desiree Allinson; *SRNA* Tommy Rials; *Nurse Practitioners* Ellen McCue and Diane O’Laughlin; *OR Nurses* Jacqui Hurd, Joann Hutcheson, Jenni Prevatt and Lauren Willis; *Surgical Tech* Kim Perryman; *LPN* Mike Caldwell; *Floor Nurses* Elizabeth Beazley, Kayla Bond, Connie Campbell, Daniel Choi, Audrey Eden, Erin Gonzalves, Courtney McBrearity, Karla Perkins, Micah Walden and Janice Tulawan; *Paramedic* Daniel Iniguez;; *Dental Asst. Trainee* Kay Wyatt; *Translators* Cynthia Allen, Olguita Brazzel, Amy Class, Lucy Howard, Mark Ketchersid, Tony Martinez, JoLee Thayer and Norma Trujillo; *Sterilization Crew* Adam Cotter, Stephen Cotter, Lori Crawford and Jesse Pettengill; *Caregivers* Jane Dye, Meliah Jimenez, Kaitlin Maloney, Karen Morrison, Heather Russo, Harriette Shivers and Gary Tabor; *Trip Chaplain* Tommy LeFan; *Team Leader* Rick Harper.

As Health Talents has matured and enlarged its’ circle of supporters, it is common for each team to have volunteers from 10-15 states and this team was no exception with Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia represented.

Our California travelers and a few from Texas flew into Guatemala City on Friday night and enjoyed a good night of rest before meeting the remainder of the team at the airport as we arrived on Delta or United. One bag was delayed on Saturday and another with a team member arriving on Sunday. Eventually, all of the delayed luggage was received.

Upon arrival at Clinica Ezell, we commenced with a bit of *organized chaos* as supplies brought down in the luggage of more than fifty team members were brought into the dining room or lab for sorting and inventorying. (Meds to the lab, all other supplies spread out on twelve tables in the dining room.) It takes a couple of hours, but this is a good use of our time as the surgeons are seeing patients with the aid of translators, anesthesia is prepping equipment and the rest of the team is helping in a very productive manner.

Following supper, Rick held a brief orientation period and invited the team to join him in “praying a circle around Clinica Ezell and Health Talents” with four specific requests for 2014. Help us identify the best new communities to serve; lead us to new donors who can provide \$100,000 to support our growth; raise up the Guatemala church volunteers we need to partner with us in the new communities and bless us with two to three new churches to plant or nurture. Each day, several on the team walked around the clinic praying and on Friday, we walked around seven times, much like the children of Israel marching around Jericho seven times.

Sunday morning began with a leisurely breakfast and worship with the Montellano church family. For veterans, this is a time of reunion with our Guatemalan brethren and chance to watch the first-timers who are overwhelmed with the joyous singing. After worship, we quickly held a thorough orientation with Dr. Walter Sierra and nurse, Rosario Poncio...then a quick lunch with surgery beginning around 1:30. Six hours later, we had completed three general cases, three urology cases and one GYN case. Sadly, one of the GYN patients proved to have inoperable cancer. Her plight would weigh heavy on our hearts all week long, especially when we meet with the family later in the week.

It is never easy to deliver bad news of this type and Health Talents is honored to have highly capable and incredibly compassionate Guatemalan team members who accept this responsibility with much grace. Pulling from past experience, Rick shared the occasion when Dr. Lisa Dunham was the bearer of such news in the highlands. Lisa told the patient that (paraphrased), *sometimes, God gives us advance notice and time to get our life in order. How is your relationship with Him?* Ultimately, Dr. Lisa's patient studied the Bible along with her two daughters and decided to be baptized and name Jesus as their Lord. Several on the team found comfort with that approach and were comforted to later learn that our patient was secure in her relationship with God.

We began the week with more than ninety patients scheduled for surgery or consultations. Unfortunately, many of the patients scheduled were not viable candidates for this week. Reasons ranged from high blood pressure, fever, infections, complicated cases beyond our ability, inoperable or simply did not require surgery. Monday would be a fairly full day with nine general cases and five GYN, but only by moving some of Tuesday's patients to Monday. We quickly went into our monitor and adjust mode and began calling Wednesday and Thursday patients to come in a day early or to arrive mid-morning without having eaten.

On Tuesday, we completed three GYN cases and with Dr. Cleveland "shaking the trees" we completed thirteen general cases. Later that day we called six of the patients scheduled for surgery in January and asked them to come in on Wednesday. We had a wonderful crew and we were doing all we could to make good use of their time, talent and desire to serve.

(Dr. Cleveland hard at work)



Over the past two days, Harriette Shivers and Cynthia Allen conducted scholarship interviews and it was now time for them to head to Chichi for the Highland interviews. We kept track of their progress, Cynthia made sure we knew that she stopped for ice cream at Parma, about halfway between Cocales and Las Trampas, and they safely arrived at Hotel Santo Tomas by mid-afternoon. They would later rejoin the team in Antigua on Friday, even beating us there that morning.

We had two physicians going out each day with our mobile teams, Dr. David Brazzel's specialty is emergency medicine, while Dr. Steve Namihis is a family practice physician. David is the older brother of board member, Cynthia Allen, and a Spanish speaker so he was very well suited to serve in this role. Both men were a wonderful help to Drs. Lopez, Lux and Sierra throughout the week. On Wednesday, Dr. Brazzel saw a patient who needed surgery and much to his amazement, we were able get her lab work done that day and have her in the OR room by 6:00 that evening. David was in awe of the efficient way our Guatemalan team worked to make this happen and commented that a non-emergency patient in the US would never be able to work her way through the system so quickly.

In Guatemala, we often find a way!

Our trip chaplain this week was Tommy LeFan, the pulpit minister of the Fredericksburg Church of Christ. Tommy did a masterful job each evening with his down home, easy going style, practical messages and illustrations. One of the challenges all trip chaplains face is the fatigue of their audience, sometime they are very weary and other times moderately so. We, HTI, believe it is very important to set aside the time for devotionals as it reminds us of the major reason we are in Guatemala. It lifts our spirits and helps to insure we are Spirit led. Trip chaplains like Tommy who understand the importance of brevity and well-reasoned devotional thoughts quickly endear themselves to team members.

Wednesday yielded another thirteen general patients, one GYN and two urology and we only had one general patient left for Thursday.

Your writer has never been on a team with only one patient scheduled for Thursday, so it was time for a change to our routine. Instead of sending a small group on an outing to Lake Atitlan that morning and a large group at noon, we reversed our schedule and sent the large group first thing and even then, we waited until the lone surgical case was done. The early departure was a good thing as the shuttle bus broke down a few miles from their destination and after a lengthy delay, we ended up sending alternate transportation to ferry them to San Lucas Toliman and hired two vans to return to Clinica Ezell that afternoon.

The total number of surgery patients for the week was 55 as our time at Clinica Ezell drew to a close. However, our coastal ministry team had a wonderful surprise for the HTI Board of Directors before we loaded up for Antigua on Friday morning as they presented a tapestry to Rick Harper recognizing Health Talents' forty years of ministry.

Health Talents International is blessed with hundreds of volunteers from the US and we have an incredible ministry team working all year long in Guatemala. Our Guatemalan team never ceases to humble us with their gracious, gentle, loving service.

