

Health Talents International

Eye Surgery Trip

November 14-21

Trip Participants: Ophthalmologist: Meredith Ezell; Optometrist: Mardee O'Donnell; Pre-med Student: Casey Lowrance; Translator: Mary Patterson; Team Leader: Julie Wheatley

This group started out quickly with no customs trouble or delays at the airport. The only new team member to the group was Casey Lowrance and we initiated him properly with a stop at Pollo Campero on the way to Montellano. Danny was our designated chauffeur and did a great job getting us to Ezell safe and sound.

When we arrived in Montellano we settled into our rooms and got to work right away. Casey got a tour of the hospital and was more than ready to lend a helping hand as we prepared the operating rooms. Glen and Neva Berkey were also along for the trip and were a HUGE asset to the team. Glen was so helpful with his prior experience in the OR working on eye cases. We had several newly donated instruments that Glen and Meredith were able to compile to give us two almost complete trays of instruments. Neva spent most of her time giving “gotas” or drops (not “gatos” which stands for cats!) to our patients preparing them for surgery.

Saturday Mardee started out seeing patients and getting their eye sight along with his helpers Mary and Casey. Once Mardee had examined the patients and had them ready for Dr. Ezell, she came along and made the final decision about who needed the operation and which eye needed to be done first. We scheduled a few surgeries for Sunday, had a short orientation, sang together, prayed for our patients and our week and headed off to bed to rest up for our first day of surgery.

Sunday morning we shared breakfast together and joined the Montellano Church of Christ for worship. After our time of fellowship we all sat around the table and had lunch together. One of the nice things about having a small team was the time shared between us during meal times. We all ate together and it felt very much like a family each time we gathered together to share a meal and good conversation.

Surgery went well throughout the week and we saw several patients in clinic as well. Dr. Ezell operated on 21 patients all together. Mardee and team would screen patients, Meredith would sign off or refer for other services and the week flowed rather smoothly.

Monday was the first full day of surgery. Danny worked in the sterilization room and kept on top of things so that the surgeries could continue on without any disruptions. Mary had learned great amounts of Spanish at her language school over the previous 11 weeks and did a wonderful job serving as translator for both Dr. Ezell and Mardee. Casey was able to train with Glen on how to scrub the eye surgeries so that Glen could circulate and keep things running smoothly. This group worked together like clockwork!

Since we were a smaller team we didn't have a designated chaplain. This worked out nicely though because the gentlemen all stepped in and took a turn sharing some thoughts and leading some discussion. Carlos, Mardee and Casey each took a night to bring some thoughts before us. Although this team was small in number it was rich in good singing voices so we did spend lots of time each evening lifting up song of praise to our most Awesome Father!

Wednesday was a shorter day in surgery because a couple of patients had to be referred to future clinics because of blood pressure problems. We took advantage of the day and headed out to the cacao farm to visit the sweet family there. We were able to take some nice pictures with the gigantic Ceiba tree and played with the children. It rained on us some but we didn't mind getting a little wet and visiting with the family. The parrots were talking, the little chicks were running around and the children were smiling, we are always greeted so very warmly at the cacao farm!

On Thursday we had to say an early goodbye to Mardee since he was returning early. Thursday was another shorter surgery day and we took the afternoon to visit Santo Tomas. Manuela, one of our dental assistants and now a scholarship student in dentistry, served as our guide as we walked through the market place, up the viewing tower, through the cathedral, and of course past Sarita to eat some yummy helado (ice cream).

On Friday morning we said goodbye to the last couple patients that were still in the hospital and headed out for Antigua. It was a beautiful day in Antigua, the sun was shining and the temperature was just right. We spent time in the market, relaxing at the hotel and dined together that evening. Alex showed up after dinner to deliver the famous coffee we are all so fond of and we headed off to bed until breakfast.

Saturday morning we enjoyed a nice buffet breakfast before we headed out for the airport. We had some time to kill so we did one last loop through the market before checking out of the hotel and heading to the airport. We got onto the plane and started the journey home around noon. God truly blessed us with a wonderful team and a great week!

Scroll Down for pictures!

