

Health Talents International
July Eye Surgery Trip
July 17-24

Trip Participants: **Eye surgeon:** Jerry Swale; **Optometrist:** Don LoConte; **Physical Therapist:** Steve Howe; **Physical Therapy Student:** Jackie Swale; **Surgical Tech:** Andrea Eenigenburg; **Nurse:** Lauren Holmes; **Translators:** Anne Craddock, Sandy Sims, Haley Howe; **Compassionate caregivers:** Laura Swale, Ryan Swale, Steve Swale, Caleb Bedgood, Matt Swale, Leigh Roberts, Virginia Huggins, Melissa Myers, Ann Grantham, Olivia Sims, Elsa Sims, Somer Howe; **Sterilization:** Glen Huggins, Scott Sims; **Mural Painters:** Beth Swale, Lydia Howe; **Chaplain:** Daniel Roberts; **Interns:** Grace Strickland, Macie Mills; **Trip Leader:** Julie Wheatley

The people on this trip gathered together in Guatemala City from a variety of different places. Some of the team members met up with the group at the airport meanwhile two groups flew in from Atlanta and Houston. Once all of the suitcases were loaded onto the chicken bus we headed out for Montellano. The drive out of the city took what seemed like forever as we sat in traffic in Guatemala City. We finally made it through the traffic and safely to Clinica Ezell.

Several patients were patiently waiting when we arrived so Dr. LoConte and Dr. Swale got quickly to work. Dr. Swale and Andrea set to work preparing the operating rooms and we all gathered together for dinner. It was a bit of a late night as we worked to see all the patients and prepare everything for the next day. Glen and Scott were able to get the sterilization room under control and had all the instruments ready for surgery the next day.

Sunday morning we gathered together for breakfast and then headed across the street for church with the Montellano Church of Christ. Lots of pictures were taken after church with the kids from church. After lunch the crew made their way into the OR and started operating. After dinner that night we met together and went around the room and introduced ourselves. We typically do this on Saturday night but after the long wait in traffic and the patient visits we were too tired! There were four operations done that afternoon and the team had gotten the feel for how things would run and by Monday morning things were on a roll!

On Monday the OR stayed busy all day long. Don and his helpers were able to see the following day's patients that afternoon. Everyone on the team was helpful and willing to pitch in wherever they could. Several people went out on mobile clinics with Dr. Walter and Dr. David while others pitched in helping pray for patients, painting fingernails and doing vision checks. The day went by quickly and after dinner Daniel led us in some devotional time. Having a chaplain on a trip is such a great blessing and having a social go getter like Daniel was delightful. Daniel gave us each some time to share about our daily experiences.

On Tuesday we had more people out at mobile clinics, including the physical therapy crew who went to Samayac with Dr. Walter. They were able to see several patients and spend good quality time teaching

their patients a variety of exercises and stretches to help them strengthen their muscles and reduce their pain. The most exciting thing Steve and Jackie were able to do were three different training sessions with the health promoters and other staff at Clinica Ezell. They spent two afternoons training the health promoters on some basic physical therapy techniques and a full morning working with other staff members. All of their students were excited to be learning new ways in which they would be able to help the patients we so often see with sore backs, stiff knees and a number of other issues. We are so grateful to Steve and Jackie for their willingness to teach and share their knowledge.

Wednesday was another full day of surgery. Laura Swale spent most every day working alongside her dad and Andrea in the OR. She was a huge help and a hard worker. Things went so well in the OR partly because of the great helpers who worked so hard to prepare patients all day long. Our trip chaplain Daniel along with a variety of other helpers spent most of every day praying for each patient while dropping the proper eye drops into patients' eyes.

One special patient we had come in was named Cesar. Julie received a call about Cesar from a church in California. The brothers there had found Cesar living behind a car in a parking garage because he had lost his job due to his blindness. As Cesar explained it, he was hit by a car while bicycling and shortly after that happened he formed cataracts in both eyes and eventually lost his job. After the brothers in California met him, he was baptized and they started to work toward sending him home to Guatemala to be with his family. They found HTI on line and called Julie who put Cesar in touch with Carlos. Cesar had his first cataract removed this week and is now scheduled for November. He was a special patient for many on the team and his story was so heartwarming. Cesar gave all the credit for his travels and for his care to God. We were encouraged by his faith and look forward to seeing him back in November.

While the surgical clinic was on a roll two special ladies were hard at work at a completely different task. Beth and Lydia spent their days across the street at the church building with many curious faces staring through the doors and windows of the classrooms as they painted two different murals. The largest mural is of the seven days of creation. Each day has its own globe showing what took place on that day of creation. The murals created a buzz of activity and lots of excitement as many of the church members passed by to see the wall as the mural took place. Beth and Lydia have certainly left a beautiful painting that will put smiles on faces for many years.

Thursday finally rolled around with just a few surgeries to complete. Once all the surgeries were successfully completed we totaled them up giving us 36 for the week. A productive week and many people who were able to walk out of Clinica Ezell with sight restored and all the glory given to God!

Thursday was a busy day for side trips as well. One group went to check out the Cacao farm Wednesday afternoon and on Thursday they headed up to the waterfall or walked around the village of Montellano. The rest of the group split up between the waterfall and the cacao farm tours and when everyone was back at Ezell for the night a large group decided to play some ultimate Frisbee. The game was intense and messy since it had just rained but loads of fun. The other evening activity that kept the crowd busy was Bananagrams a game similar to Scrabble. Lots of the group stayed up a while each night divided into teams and attempted to think of words faster than the other teams. This good community time at

night was just a piece of what made this trip such a great experience for all. The combination of personalities and skills was great and everyone had a wonderful week.

Thursday night we went around the group and allowed everyone to share something from the week. Many hearts were touched, tears were cried and hugs were shared. It was great having the Howe, Sims and Swale families on the trip. The presence of these families gave us that close knit family feel all week long.

Once again we had a great week!

Written by: Julie



Health Promoter training _____ Dr. Swale, Cesar, Dr. LoConte

