

HEALTH TALENTS INTERNATIONAL  
Surgery Clinic Trip Report  
June 5-12, 2010

(Submitted by Marie Agee)

Team Members: Surgeons Drs. A.D. Smith and George Haight; Anesthesiologist Dr. Brian Alexander; Pediatrician Dr. David Weed; CRNA Jan DeHaven; Nurses DeVona Haight (head nurse), Misty Vance, Jeanie Langston, June Walker, Eileen Weed, Janelle Sladek, Barbara Jones, Mallory Brown, Ruby Lucroy, Norman Jenkins, Sandi Miller; Surg tech Cameron Pearson; Eliot Alexander, Steve Cotter, Adam Cotter, John Flynt, John Gemma, Glenn McGehee, Houston McGehee, Katelyn Hervey, Amy Harvey, Patrick Owens (Med Stud), Lily Smith, Sharon Smith, Jesse Pettengill, Gary Tabor, Linda Tabor, Jennifer Walker, Joe Dale Wilson, and Marie Agee.

The surgical team arrived in Guatemala with a bit of anxiety about the condition of the roads in the aftermath of the tropical storm that blasted through Guatemala a week earlier. We'd been warned that there were multiple mud slides on the coastal highway, blocking the highway down to only one lane. What a nightmare THAT would be! Fortunately, however, the roads were all open and we literally sailed to Montellano, arriving there by 4 pm! That left us plenty of time to unpack and unwind before the busy week began. We closed out the evening with an uplifting devotional by our trip chaplain, Joe Dale Wilson, from Vernon, Texas.

Sunday, June 6: We followed our normal Sunday schedule with a 2-hour church service and a medical orientation by Dr. Walter Sierra and Rosario Poncio, then lunch. The place became a beehive when the surgical cases began. Five cases had been initially scheduled, but since two of the people arriving for examination had not eaten all day, the docs decided to add them to the schedule as well. All the cases were fairly straightforward, but since we didn't begin surgery until 2, it made for a late day... the only one of the week actually. The mother of a 3-yr-old hernia patient told me she had 11 children! Total surgery count for day: 7

Monday, June 7: The surgical cases today were mostly hernias, as usual, but we did a breast biopsy as well plus Dr. Haight removed two gall bladders via laparoscopy. The last person operated on for the day told our chaplain, Joe Dale Wilson, that he had 17 children! Another man wouldn't say how many children he had, but he did admit to having 27 grandchildren...so far! These are hardy people for sure. Joe Dale spoke some Spanish, so he spent lots of time with our patients in pre-op. Also, Nurse Sheri Kretschmar arrived from the highlands to give us a hand. Yea!

The group was great! Half of them had never been to Guatemala and many were students. They all had great spirits and were willing to do whatever we asked them to do. And... EVERY SINGLE NURSE WAS WILLING TO WORK NIGHTS! Now THAT is almost a miracle in itself! Another interesting side note about the non-medical folks in this group was

that they weren't all that interested in going out on mobile clinics. A few of them did, but most wanted to stay and help out/watch the surgeries.

Many veteran team members commented that the organization at Clinica Ezell gets better and better with each trip. This is due largely to the efforts of Rosario and Darling, with Carlos' guidance, who work at it constantly. I was amused by a new sign on the door to the outside bodega that read: "If you take anything from the *winery*, please record it." Darling walked up just as I read it, and she heard me laugh. She wanted to know what was so funny, and when I explained the meaning of "winery," she was so embarrassed! She quickly marked it out and wrote in "inventory." I told her that if word got out that we were running a winery down here we'd have a rampage on our hands! Oh, the joys of bi-lingual communication.

Sharon Smith, surgeon A.D.'s wife, began work on another of her beautiful murals for us. This one will be on the far wall in the patient ward, on the men's side and will depict the Garden of Eden. She leaves us with a visual mark of her presence at Ezell each time she comes that multitudes of people enjoy.

Six MET students showed up today. Nathan and Carrie stayed to help at clinic while the others went out on mobile clinics with Dr. David Lux and Dr. Walter.

Pascual, father of little Domingo who is in Austin, Texas, for surgery, arrived this afternoon with his son, Jovani, to visit with Gary and Linda Tabor. Gary and Linda have been a source of great support for Domingo's mother, Catarina, at the hospital in Austin. Gary took a picture of Pascual and Jovani and emailed it to Catarina. Report has it that she was thrilled!

We finished the day with a total of 10 cases.

Tuesday, June 8: Today was just like yesterday...but just a little bit different, as Dr. Ken Mitchell used to say. Again, we did hernias and gall bladders. All the MET students stayed today to ensure that they all got an opportunity to view surgery before moving to the mountain villages on Wednesday. Half of them worked in the OR and the other half in the ward, and they changed places halfway thru the day. Andrea Jernigan is one of the MET students. Her father, Jon Jernigan, had been a member of HTI's very first mission team in Guatemala back in 1980. Nathan Hurley had come to Guatemala with his parents in the mid-90's for his father to run Dr. Mike Kelly's clinics when Mike and Julie came home. Nathan had been only 5 yrs old at the time. Now he is back as a university student headed towards med school himself. We're moving into the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation for HTI! Had 12 cases today, and all did very well.

Four-yr-old little Herson got the "Most Charming Patient of the Day" award today. He was in for removal of some growths on his torso, but what he has to live with every day is and will be forever very challenging. He has a genetic condition called, "Congenital Giant Pigmented Nevus." He is covered with dark moles, some of them hairy, all over his little body. A large part of his torso and one of his legs down to his knee is blackened with the mole-like tissue and covered with hair. There is no known cure, and ten percent of the children with it end up with malignant

melanoma, seizures, and/or developmental delays. Right now, however, he is a charming little boy with a huge smile. His two loving parents have gotten him off to a great start in what will surely be a life filled with challenges.

We finished the day as usual with our group devo. Afterwards, Gary Tabor reviewed HTI's mission and ministry for the group so they could all have a larger understanding of HTI and the importance of the part they played in what was going on this week.

Wednesday, June 9: The patient star today was 10-yr-old Wendy with the beautiful smile! Wendy had come to us for the removal of a benign tumor on her scalp, just above her pretty face. The unusual thing was that her mother had brought her the day before and got her checked in...then went home to Samayac. We were all a little shocked that her mother would have left her alone, but Wendy seemed to take it in stride. The nurses took her immediately under their wings, especially nursing student Jennifer Walker. Her mother had still not shown up after the surgery was completed, so Sheri went looking for her. She found her on the other side of the gate waiting to get in. She said she'd told someone that her daughter was having surgery, but still wasn't allowed to pass thru. Sheri and I later talked with Rosario and told her what had happened to avoid such instances in the future. A girl needs her mom when she's having surgery, even if she is as apparently mature as little Wendy was.

Alfredo, one of our gardeners, also had surgery today. I recognized him as I passed thru the IV start area, sitting there in one of our cute little hospital gowns! (He did not have his machete in hand as he typically does, however!) As usual, he had a big, friendly smile on his face.

One of Dr. Mike Kelly's former health promoters, Felipe, was also a patient today. Felipe's son was with him, and he spoke a good bit of English. He is the principal of the elementary school in Santo Tomas. He asked about Mike and how he and his family were doing and seemed delighted to hear current news about him. Mike is still so revered in that area even after all these years.

My Spanish has improved enough that I helped translate in the pre-op exams today, which was my first time ever to do this. One young woman with a 3-month-old baby came in with great concern that she had breast cancer. Dr. Haight examined her and assured her that her problem did not involve breast tissue at all. She cried with relief. Another patient, an elderly woman, was strongly suspected of having colon cancer, so Walter was going to send her to a hospital better equipped than we were for treatment of that kind.

At orientation on the first day of clinic, Dr. Walter asked the team to provide a daily report of the controlled drugs that were used. He has to provide this information to the government after the team leaves and said he'd been having difficulty making the reported usage match up with the drug availability because by the time he received the report there was no one left at Clinica Ezell to ask when he had questions. Well, the head nurse, DeVona Haight, took this on as a personal challenge! Each day she carefully compiled the nurses' report with the anesthesia report, and at the end of the week she joyfully reported that each day's report was perfect

record of the drug usage! Dr. Walter was ecstatic and asked if he could hire her! Thanks for your diligence, DeVona.

Thursday, June 10: Lumps and bumps cases today...all very quick and easy to remove. We were finished by 1 pm. Carlos and I arranged to send the team to see the Pacific Ocean as an outing. In all our trips, we'd only made that particular excursion once before, so it was new to everyone. Jesse Pettengill, who was born and raised in Maine and now lives on Long Island, said he'd never seen the Pacific, so he was particularly interested. I explained that the Pacific Ocean beach off the coast off Guatemala didn't look like the Pacific off the coast of Hawaii...so as not to have anyone who'd seen that beach come back disillusioned!

We finished the week with 53 surgeries, and we give thanks to God that all did well and that there were no medical crises or emergencies all week. I think I can speak for the entire team when I say that we were blessed personally for having been in Guatemala this week and watched God at work.



Sharon Smith's newest work!



June 2010 Surgery Team



Dr. Haight and RN Norman Jenkins performing a gall bladder removal.



Wendy and her mom, as she was recovering from her surgery.



Happy little Herson, playing on his bed before surgery.