

Health Talents International

General/Gyn Surgery Clinic
September 19-October 6, 2012

TRIP REPORT – by Marie Agee

Participants: *General Surgeons* Drs. Mark Crane and Paul Humphrey; *Gyns* Drs. Ana-Maria Gray, Rebecca King, Roger Knowlton, Belinda Perez, and Juliette Proust; *Anesthesiologist* Dr. Brad Watson, *CRNAs* Jeff Cherye, Duane Gill and Shannon Sexton; *OR Nurses* Karen Althage, Amanda Eggleston, Peggy Hood, Cathy Jones and Bonnie Meyer; *Floor Nurses* Audrey Ayres, Suzan Bell, Neva Berkey, Connie Campbell, Belva Gettings, Elizabeth Gettings, Elaine Griffin, Abby Matthews, Dawn Skinner, Ariel Sturgis, Katherine Williams and Cheryl Winfield; *Dental Hygienist* Bonnie Parham; *Surg Techs* John Jones and Alex Tungesvik; *Translators* Cynthia Allen, Olguita Brazzel, Amy Class, Logan Cross, Genevieve Davila, Lucy Howard, Rosa Jenson, Mike Martinez and Tony Martinez; *Sterilization Crew* Mark Ketchersid, Gary Tabor, Deb Wright, and Kay Wyatt; *Handymen* H.V. Gill and Dennis Griffin; *Caregivers* Lauren Bell, Jane Dye, Marianne Jones, Karen Morrison, Makayla Samaras, Harriette Shivers, Linda Tabor, and Carly Watson; *Team Leaders* Marie Agee and Julie Wheatley.

This was not only a large team, but it was also quite diverse geographically: 13 states, including D.C., and one nurse from Guatemala City! On the plane down, I made a list of the various places we were from: California - 19, Tennessee - 9, Vermont - 7, Missouri - 5, Texas - 4, Georgia - 2, Arkansas - 2, Alabama - 1, Kentucky - 2, Virginia - 1, New York - 1, Wyoming - 1, Washington DC - 1, and Guatemala City - 1.

People arrived on several different flights; some even the night before. I distributed the lists to everyone on my flight stating that the supplies we were carrying were approved. But, good luck prevailed! Just as we were going through the customs line, another group showed up from the opposite direction with many, many footlockers labeled “Medicine.” All the custom agents’ attention was diverted to them, so they waved us on through! I knew right then it was going to be a *great week*.

Upon arrival at Clinica Ezell, Cynthia Allen immediately took charge of inventorying all the medicines and supplies we have brought. Her team of 19 from California was quite efficient and had it all under control in no time flat. I feel sure that Rosario and Darling were very happy.

While this was going on, the surgeons began to do pre-op exams on patients who were hopeful of being approved for surgery on Sunday.

The chaplain of the group was Tony Martinez. I did a double-take upon meeting him because this 60-something year old man had his hair in one long braid hanging down his back. But, my oh my, when he opened his mouth, he was such a great guy! The devotionals he offered throughout the week were often pretty short in time, but long on the point he was making. He explained to me later that the reason he wears his hair like that is that he is frequently asked to give talks with groups of teenagers, and it helps them relate to him and accept him much more quickly. Hopefully, this translates into their actually *hearing* what he has to tell them about God.

Surgeries began as usual on Sundays and were uneventful...just the way we like them. By the end of the day, they had performed 8 surgeries. We were indeed off to a good start.

On Monday Julie told me that for the first time we were going to ask for blood donors ahead of any need. On this same trip last year, a patient gave them a real scare with internal bleeding post-op. To be sure we were prepared in case something unusual happened this year, three team members who had 0+ or 0- blood agreed to donate. It was a good thing, too, because we ended up using one of the pints later in the week.

On Monday it was clear we were developing a good rhythm. By the end of the day the general surgeons had operated on 10 patients; the gyns 5.

The general surgeons, Dr. Mark Crane and Dr. Paul Humphrey, had a steady, measured approach to scheduling. The most they ever scheduled all week for a single day was 12, which was very doable. The gyns were all female with the exception of Dr. Roger Knowlton. I happened to walk into the OR on one occasion when the entire team on that case was female...a first at Clinica Ezell. Under the leadership of veteran trip-goer, Dr. Ana-Maria Gray, all the gyns seemed to have that same measured pace. They were all finished almost every night around dinner time. Not a late, late night all week. That is always good.

One thing that helped considerably was having the large team. Within it there was an ample supply of nurses. We were able to cover all our critical nursing spots with medical professionals. We sometimes have to use non-medical people to circulate in the OR.

And translators? We had more than I have ever seen on a team! That was such a blessing.

On Tuesday Julie introduced me to a young mother and her baby, 11-month-old Fredy. Fredy had a really bad-looking skin problem. His mother said he began getting big blisters on his face when he was just a few months old. After consulting a doctor for a second time, she was told he likely had an allergy to the sun. One of the surgeons did a biopsy on him that Julie took to Nashville to deliver to an HTI board member, a dermatologist at Vanderbilt. Although the biopsy didn't reveal much, he was able to diagnosis based on photos of the baby and his history that it was most likely xeroderma pigmentosa after all. This allergy to ultraviolet rays is a very rare condition seen in only 1 in 250,000 births.

Another sad case was a woman with large fibroid tumors who was suspected of having advanced cancer. The pathology report later confirmed that she did. This 38-year-old woman had many children, something like 10, and the oldest was 25 years old. Think about that. She had her first child when she was only 13. Her given name was Maria Ambrocio. Please pray for her.

While surgery was going on, some people had the opportunity to go out on a mobile medical or dental clinic or with the community development team. H.V. Gill, father of CRNA Duane Gill, is a retired soil conservationist. He went with Oscar, the lead community developer (not "*organizer!*") and enjoyed it immensely. They traveled to La Florida, a community settled by migrant workers who hadn't a clue about raising a garden or laying water lines. H.V. saw a garden full of healthy beans that one man was raising. He also saw a well without any protection from the chickens that walked all around it. It was clear to him that they still need lots of education.

Bonnie Parham from Nashville is a dental hygienist, and she spent her time both cleaning teeth and teaching the newly hired dental tech how to do it. She also had the privilege of going on a mobile dental clinic to San Basilio on Monday.

Board president Harriette Shivers and Cynthia Allen spent their time conducting scholarship interviews. They had 30 of them scheduled during the week. On Tuesday they left Clinica Ezell to drive up to the Highlands to interview prospective students there. They rejoined the team in Antigua on Friday.

On Wednesday one of the gyn patients lost a lot of blood during surgery. Dr. Gray and Dr. Knowlton decided to give her some of our stockpiled blood later that evening. Because of what happened a year ago, everyone was a bit tense so a lot of praying was going on! All went well for the first half pint of blood, then the woman began to have a reaction to it. Fortunately, her reaction was short lived, but they stopped the transfusion anyway. The doctors said she would be fine, although it might take her a little longer to recover completely. She was able to go home by the time the team left Ezell. (Our only option at Clinica Ezell is to use whole blood in transfusions, so reactions are not unusual. The Red Cross spins the white cells out of the blood in the States, and that makes it much easier for a body to accept it.)

The team seemed very interested in HTI history, so they asked if I would take some time one evening to tell them more about it. I typically give an overview of HTI on Wednesday night, but because they asked, I spent

about 30 minutes on Tuesday night sharing some Guatemala and Mayan history with them. I also briefly described our first clinic in the Petén more than 30 years ago.

Dr. Silvia, HTI's Guatemalan dentist at Clinica Ezell, had two pre-schoolers who need extractions. Both of the kiddos were extremely resistant to even the idea of such a thing, so Silvia asked the anesthesia team for help. After much consultation as to the best method of providing just a touch of their magic to get the job done, anesthesia agreed to help. The next morning the kids came to the OR, and before you knew it, the teeth were out and the children recovered. Popsicles helped.

The total number of surgery patients for the week was 58. We were all very grateful to our God for permitting us to have such a smooth week. We celebrated on Thursday by taking a trip up to Lake Atitlan for lunch. As always...to God be the Glory!



Baby Fredy



Chaplain Tony offers encouragement to a waiting patient.



One of our precious little patients



October 2022 Surgery Team



Scholarship Applicants interviews...in process