

Health Talents International
General/GYN Surgery Clinic
October 1-8, 2016
Trip Report

Participants: *General Surgeon* Dr. Kirby Sweitzer; *GYN Surgeons* Drs. Janel Crawford, Tom Deeble, Rebecca King, Adriana Piazza and Mark Seaver; *Family Practice Emergency* Dr. David Brazzel; *Anesthesiologist* Dr. David Crasto; *CRNAs* Desiree Cherye, Jeff Cherye and Tim Dawson; *OR Nurses:* Misty Camp, Andrea Markham, Katie Simmons and Barbara Van Beckum; *Surgical Tech;* Kathy Jackson; *OR Circulators:* Ken Earle and Angie Neff; *Recovery Nurses* Mary-Dallis Allison, Henry Beseda, Sharon Bylsma, Sherry Gold, Jacqui Hurd, Carra Linde, Rosio Moreno, Naeemah Neel-Cooley, Adair Osman, Michelle Parlier, Aaron Redelsperger, Terry Verkler, Sandra Wilkinson and Ariel Young; *Translators* Cynthia Allen, Kathlyn Beyer, Kristin Beyer, Olguita Brazzel, Amy Class, Tony Martinez and Rita Sills; *Sterilization Crew* Dan Dawson and Cary Sills; *Caregivers* Jane Dye, Thomas McGinness, Nancy Osman, Amy Redelsperger, Ashley Shultz and Pamela Vincent; *Trip Chaplain* Ken Dye *Team Leader* Rick Harper.

**“Walking Bible verses,” “teamwork makes the dream work,”
“you can’t put just before your title.”**

This report begins with comments from the end of our week, those in quotes above this paragraph. Please allow the sentiment expressed by various team members at the conclusion of our week together to frame your thoughts as you read the remainder of the 2016 edition of the October trip report.

Our team numbered forty-nine, at least that was the number prior to including those who call Guatemala home, after which our number swells to over one hundred. Twenty-four first-timers and twenty-five veterans hailing from ten states and ranging in age from eighty to eighteen. A translator from the Bronx, a few southern belles, one Texas Aggie, a North Dakotan transplanted in California, a Californian transplanted in Arkansas, a fashion designer turned RN, a youth minister turned LPN, mothers, daughters, sons, husbands and wives, we spanned the breadth of the US from coast to coast. A team assembled to serve, a dream team designed to glorify God through that very service.

Flights were mostly on schedule, though we had team members on three airlines and five different flights. We were loaded with everyone accounted for before 2:00 and off to Montellano. The bus ride was uneventful, my favorite kind of travel.

Newbies took pictures as we navigated traffic in Guatemala City, then began taking in the beautiful landscape as we drove down the mountain towards the coastal highway. Active volcano Pacaya on the left, active volcano Fuego on the right and long dormant volcanoes Agua, Acatenango, Santiago, Toliman and San Pedro in the distance. Fields of sugar cane as far as the eye could see once we turned on CA 1, the coastal stretch of the Pan American highway, interspersed with fields of pineapples and stands of rubber trees.

Patients were waiting when we arrived at Clinica Ezell and within a short time, all supplies were unpacked, inventoried and put away. Our surgeons and translators spent a few hours consulting with patients while our anesthesia providers prepped equipment for the next day. Following supper and brief orientation, the walking Bible verses became sleeping Bible verses, drifting off with the knowledge that our schedule for Sunday would be four general and four GYN cases.



Unpacking and inventorying supplies!

A good night of rest following a long day is always welcome and we awoke refreshed and ready to embrace the day. The cooking crew at Clinica Ezell does a wonderful job of preparing meals, laboring well into the evening and beginning their day before the sun rises. As a result of their hard work we awoke to the sound of tortillas being patted out for grilling, then enjoyed a typical breakfast of eggs, beans, tortillas and coffee. Simple and simply delicious!

Coffee and conversation filled the first few hours on Sunday as old friends caught up on a year's worth of living, new friendships were formed and before long, we discovered connections we never knew existed. A reminder that our world is smaller than we imagine, and made smaller by serving others.

Following breakfast, we were blessed to worship with the Montellano church family. A lesson by the ever-inspiring Carlos Baltodano, singing led by Josue Xalu and communion thoughts delivered by Dr. Nehemias Lopez. Upon exiting the building afterwards, we were treated to a birthday celebration...piñata time. Laughter, smiles, cheers and exclamations of joy as children raced to claim a sweet prize.



Dr. Kirby Sweitzer was our lone general surgeon this week and he encountered some challenging cases throughout the week, handling all of them with his Ohio OR crew, Angie, Katie and Misty. Dr. David Brazzel handled most of the general surgery consults and served as a first-assistant in the operating room for Dr. Sweitzer, a tremendous help in keeping the day flowing. Dr. Brazzel wore many hats during the week and each of them with grace and a Christ-like attitude!

Three veteran GYN surgeons were on this trip, plus one first-timer who may have had more OR experience than the other three combined. Dr. Tom Debble is now retired and volunteering with the VA, but had helped train Drs. Janel Crawford, Rebecca King and Mark Seaver in his younger years. (Dr. Adriana Piazza is a resident and being mentored by Dr. Seaver.) Day one results for our CA surgeons, four completed cases and one surgeon on the receiving end of an IV.

Dr. Janel Crawford gave all of us a scare when she collapsed going up the steps into the dining room. She had labored in the OR for several hours, then donated a unit blood in the event we needed O+ positive for an emergency. The combination of fatigue, donating a unit of blood and being dehydrated all contributed to her needing some unwanted attention as a patient. She not only recovered quickly, but handled the episode with humor and grace. As it turns out, we did need to transfuse a patient that week and the first unit of blood used was Dr. Crawford's.

Monday morning, like every Monday morning of a surgical week, contains more patients scheduled than we'll complete our first full day. Call it optimism or call it hope, such is the nature of those who come to serve and do all they can in a single week. By lunchtime, it was clear that a few cases would need to be moved to Tuesday and yet, it was an incredibly productive day with five general and eight GYN cases completed.

Ken Dye shared devotional thoughts each evening throughout the week, sharing simple stories and scriptures that left a mark on our heart. Ken found a new friend in Dr. Walter Sierra and went out each day on mobile medical clinics, loving every hot, sweaty moment. A former preacher, evangelist and missionary, Ken brings a precious spirit to any task, he is simply a “wise old bird” and one worthy of listening to. When you see him, ask him about the circus and the parade.

Tuesday would see us complete five more general and seven GYN cases and Wednesday would see the largest number of cases in a single day. Nine GYN and seven general as the week was quickly coming to an end.

Four general cases awaited us Thursday morning and we scheduled a couple of trips to the chocolate farm, one mid-morning and one after lunch. We began the transition from a busy surgical week to returning Clinica Ezell to readiness for the next surgical team.



“You can’t put just before your title.” The photo above supports that sentiment as Rita Sills is more than a translator and like each team member, our title does not define us. We weren’t just surgeons, nurses, anesthesiologist or caregivers, we were servants, friends, mentors and confidants. We donated blood, gave hugs and accepted hugs, we shared smiles, washed feet, changed linens, sweep floors, washed instruments and held hands. We sang together, prayed together and wept together.

Christian is not a title...it is a name and one we desire to define us...and we’re OK with being just Christians.

