

Health for Humanity Service Society

Guatemala 2007 Mission Report

Our fifth annual mission to Guatemala has been completed successfully and the team has safely returned to Vancouver. Although interest naturally focuses on the surgical team and the life changing surgery performed in Guatemala it is important to note that these missions would not happen without the dedicated work of our board members and other volunteers throughout the year.

Preparation starts as soon as we return from the previous mission in Guatemala. During the year the board of H4H and other volunteers are kept busy with recruiting the next team, making travel and accommodation arrangements, liaising with our partner organisations in Guatemala, collection of medical supplies and medications. Fund raising is an important activity that continues throughout the year. This year we are grateful to Eric Petersen director of the Tula Foundation which has become a major sponsor of our work in Guatemala. Eric was able to join our team and see our work first hand. We are optimistic that his foundation will continue to support H4H in future years. Semiahmoo and Millennium Rotary groups in White Rock have continued to support H4H in 2007. Also we have to thank our Campbell River members and their community who raised a record amount through their evening event.



Finally we have to thank many individual donors whose contributions large and small make it possible for us to provide surgery in the developing world. Together these funds pay for medical services and patient care expenses incurred in Guatemala. These include the cost of using the operating rooms in Antigua, surgical supplies and medications, transporting many of our patients from the rural villages, laboratory tests, and providing food and accommodation for our recovering patients. All of our medical teams travel and stay in Guatemala at their own expense and we have minimal administrative overhead.

This year our team included 14 physicians, 14 nurses and 6 support staff. With renovations complete we were able to use 4 operating rooms. On triage day our surgeons assessed 155 patients and during the two week mission in November our team completed 144 surgeries, including 32 cleft lip and palate repairs, 37 hysterectomies, 25cholecystectomies, and 23 hernia repairs. All of these surgeries have a major impact on the lives of the patients as they enable a return to full activity. Again, we worked with local professionals and there was a useful exchange of knowledge. In a new component to our mission we vaccinated 150 of the resident patients of the Obras Sociales Hospital against pneumococcal infection. Next year we hope to expand on this valuable preventative program for the long term care patients of the hospital.

It is now 12 years since the end of the civil war and the return of democracy. Each year on our return we check on the status of healthcare in Guatemala hoping to see some improvements, but again this year we learned that very little elective surgery is being performed at the National Hospitals of Guatemala. A new Government has just been elected but it remains to be seen if this will be able to change the major income discrepancy between rich and poor and increase government spending on social programs. It is clear that there is an ongoing need for our volunteer services and H4H is committed to sending surgical teams as long as the need is there. All team members, both medical and support staff, can feel proud of their contribution to a successful team effort. Together with the other volunteer teams that perform surgery at the Obras Sociales Hospital we make a significant contribution to surgery in Guatemala.

Plans are already underway for our next mission to Antigua which is scheduled to depart November 7th, 2008. Thanks again to our Board, team members, and other volunteers for their commitment and hard work. Thanks also to all our donors for their support in 2007.

Mike Morton - 2007 Medical Director, Past-President, Health for Humanity.