

Health Talents International January Surgical Clinic Jan 13-20, 2024

Team Participants: Surgeons: Jud Allen, Glen Blue, Kris Citty, Stewart Lowry, Steven Scarcliff, Scott Smith; Family Practice Physicians: Angela Driskell, Jake Erwin, Scott Harrington, Rachel Mevissen; Anesthesiologists: Lawrence Freund, Kenneth Sykes; CRNA: Beeba Kooner; Nurses: Penny Forte, Cailey Fry, Megan Hill, Karla Johnson, Jenny Lawler, DeAnna McAlister, Brandon Morris, Jenny Shults, Kelly Smith, Kristina Smith, Ann Stowe, Susan Thomas, Lori Torstenbo, Lesa Williams, Jenni Whitefield and Amy Winkler; Surgical Techs: Ashley Card, Kathy Jackson, Daniel Martin; Second Assist: Brent Shults; Translators: Rachel Finney, Rita Sills; Sterilization: Julie Anderson, Cary Sills, Paul Vandekamp; Caregivers: Caroline Freund, Jack Lawler, Alena Lowry, Kristie Scarcliff, Bailey Whitefield, Bailey Whitefield; Trip Chaplain: John Reese; Team Leader: Rick Harper

As we approached our first January surgical team since 2020, one bonus would be the warm weather. Most of us from Montana eastward, were facing a deep freeze with temperatures near zero and Montellano's 80 to 90-degree days seemed like a bargain. The weather and high winds did cause some flight delays, but by Sunday afternoon our team was complete.

Did I say, "seemed like a bargain?" Here is the journal entry from Rachel Finney, translator, interpreter extraordinaire!

The heat is just astounding. One evening, I overhear a nurse in the bathroom saying, "Every night in bed I spread out my limbs like a starfish and hope some part of me is dry by morning." In my room after my nightly shower, I squat over the running box fan in the floor, draping the bottom of my nightgown carefully over the top of the fan, hoping my roommate doesn't wake up and catch sight of me like that.

Welcome to Guatemala and the coastal plain, welcome to Aldea Montellano and Clinica Ezell Hospital, your spiritual oasis and personal sauna!

Sunday morning found the coffee club on the porch, sipping, chatting, and reveling in God's creation. The clouds remain low to the ground and the volcano, San Pedro, is still visible over the treetops. Majestic is the first word that comes to mind, awe follows and in a moment of solitude, your thoughts shift to our Maker and peace fills our soul.

Surgeries commenced following worship and lunch, uneventful for the first few hours and then an unexpected complication. As is common, most complications are related to GYN surgery, the most acute procedures we undertake. A common fibroid cyst must first be removed before we could complete the abdominal hysterectomy. We were not long into this case before general surgeon, and board member, Dr. Scott Smith. was called in to assist. The cyst was not well encapsulated, instead it almost taken on a life of its own. The appendix had grown into it, along

with blood vessels entwined with any connecting tissue or organ. For the non-medical, this meant that excising the cyst would mean significant loss of blood, and a possible emergent situation.

Once it was determined that a blood transfusion was in order, we identified a few donors from our team, called in the lab tech, and our patient received two units of blood, and safely went home later in the week.

Fifteen cases were on tap for Monday, four GYN and eleven general cases; followed by fourteen on Tuesday with three GYN and eleven in our two general rooms.



(Kathy Jackson, CST, Glen Blue, MD, Beeba Kooner, CRNA, Karla Johnson, RN and Penny Forte, RN)

We enjoyed having four family practice physicians with us, one still in residency, Dr. Jake Erwin of Pocahontas, AR. Dr. Angela Driskill has been looking for a place she could bring residents, and we hope we are the answer. Her area of special interest is wound care and with the large number of dietic patients we treat, wound care is critical and the educational needs staggering.



In addition to going out on mobile clinics, Dr. Driskill provided training to a few select patients willing to travel to see her at Clinica Ezell Hospital! (A mobile clinic feast.)

This was a week for Jennifers; Jenny Shults, a first-timer, and veterans Jenny Lawler and Jenni Whitefield. Here are our veteran nurses celebrating warmer temperatures in Guatemala, for the snow and freezing temps in Nashville. Eight to ten inches awaited them upon their return.

Wednesday, normally a transition day, ended up with our most challenging slate of GYN surgeries. While only four, total vaginal hysterectomies were a tall order, and they were up to the challenge. Our general surgeons had a light day to start with but added a few simple cases and this ended up being a full day. Of course, adding them on Wednesday lightened the load for Thursday as we only had three cases.

We concluded our week together with a trip to the chocolate farm on Thursday afternoon, then the traditional team photos on Friday morning...the off to Antigua or the US.



Until next year, we send our love to Guatemala and the precious patients entrusted to our care, and one last entry from Rachel Finney's journal.

Thank you for coming to help us Hispanics. Thank you for coming to help us poor people. May God bless you and repay you for what you have done here.

The implication of these words, as I see it, is that I don't think the communities served here really believe they are worthy of love, compassion, a kind word, or a gentle touch. Their society has conditioned them to believe that no one would ever bother to care about them. I share these thoughts with one of the nurses as we tearfully hug each other after the Wednesday night song session down on the main floor. "But we are the ones who aren't worthy," she says to me. And she is right. I am thoughtless and selfish. I waste time and I waste money and I don't try as hard as I can to do as much good as I can with the resources I have. "To whom much is given, much is required"—the parable of the talents reminds me.

And coming here reminds me too... The blessing that the patients say they have received here pales in comparison to what we get out of coming here.

We are the ones who have been blessed.



