

Guadalupe ENT Clinic March 2015

After a two-year hiatus we once again flew to Ecuador for a volunteer stint at the Mission Clinic in Guadalupe. An uneventful trip via the new Quito airport brought us to the newly renovated airport in Catamayo, where we were happy to see the familiar face of Beto the taxi driver. It had rained a lot in recent weeks and we passed several landslides on the 2 1/2 hour drive along the steep winding road to Guadalupe.



Upon arrival we were warmly greeted by old friends Clinic Director Padre Jorge Nigsch and Clinic Coordinator Amanda Anderson, along with the rest of the staff and nuns who support the Clinic for the benefit of the indigent people of southern Ecuador.

This time we were fortunate to have recently retired Dr. Ronald Smith from South Carolina as our anesthesiologist along with his wife Helen. Although Helen had no medical background, she jumped right in and was soon sterilizing instruments and assisting in the operating room, even swinging the osteotomy hammer like a pro. We don't know how we would have managed without her! We are grateful to both of them for their cheerful attitude and willingness to work long days, even on a Saturday.

The Clinic now has a fiberoptic nasopharyngoscope, a right angle laryngoscope, a mastoid drill system, two microscopes, surgical instruments for nasal, sinus, tympanoplasty and stapes procedures, and three sets of mouth gags and instruments for tonsil and adenoid surgery. Padre Jorge bought a new-used anesthesia machine, chairs and another gurney from a recently closed clinic. I brought along suture material donated by MAP-Ethicon as well as stapes prostheses and nasal splints from Medtronic. Ron contributed anesthesia supplies

and Helen brought a bag of very welcome children's gifts for our young patients. The previous ENT team, led by Dr. Roland Panis of Germany, left some valuable surgical instruments that were put to good use.



Padre's advertising attracted patients from miles around, some traveling for hours by bus who slept outside the Clinic the night before so as to be sure to be seen next morning. The first day always brings a huge crowd and this year was no exception. On our first Monday we worked till 10 pm seeing a record 91

patients! My wife Nancy entered patient data into the computer while Amanda translated when needed. After that the numbers normalized to an average of 40 per day, still a lot since they were seen between surgeries. Patients sit for hours on wooden benches, waiting their turn patiently and seldom complaining, grateful to be seen.



The surgical schedule filled up quickly so by the time Ron and Helen arrived two days after us, we had plenty of surgeries starting on Wednesday. Cases requiring overnight stays were scheduled at the hospital in the town of Zamora during our third week, after Ron and Helen left. The hospital administrator gave us an exclusive operating room and the services of Dra. Vanesa Rojas, a skillful Ecuadorian

anesthesiologist with whom I have worked before. It turned out to be a really enjoyable experience. All in all we saw 550 patients and did a total of 90 surgeries in Guadalupe and Zamora combined. Roughly a quarter of the patients were under 18. I performed 15 septoplasties, 37 septorhinoplasties, two mastoids, four stapes, ten tympanoplasties, ten tonsillectomies, one cleft lip, and various other procedures.



Clinic receptionist Marianna, a diminutive woman who has ten children (four of them in university), set up and staffed a food stall at the foot of the hanging bridge to provide meals for patients and family members. Among other things they served delicious fresh empanadas which became a regular after-supper treat for the

volunteers. Evenings were spent relaxing and chatting by candlelight on the veranda. Our group of eight was particularly compatible this year.



The rest of the volunteers serving along with us were Dr. Steve Williamson, an ER doc from North Carolina; dentist Dr. Siegbert Kiese and dental technicians Clara Goss and Judith Mohr from Germany. Siegbert was up early each morning preparing fresh fruit salad and yogurt, eggs, guacamole, toast and jam—what a treat. A couple of times I baked hearty sourdough rye bread. The communal kitchen now boasts a 10-cup coffeemaker which was highly appreciated by the caffeine addicted among us. Breakfast is

delightful sitting at the long table on the veranda, overlooking the jungle-clad hills and valley shrouded in morning mist. A waterfall tumbled down far above us.

Weekday meals at the Convent dining room were especially good this year, with lots of well-prepared vegetables and salads. Mealtimes together provided pleasant breaks to our busy days. Umbrellas got a work-out this visit, with daily rain showers and near constant overcast skies. On the bright side, the Clinic is much cooler than when the sun beats on the roof and heats it up. We were too busy to enjoy the outdoors during the week anyway. One night a lightning strike knocked out the electricity, but the big generator kept everything going smoothly. Workers had to hike up a steep mountain to fix the cell phone and internet antennas.



On our first day off, a Sunday, the eight of us hiked an hour and a half to the nearby village of Piuntza for a tour of a frog and fish farm. Big fat frogs and tilapia are raised in a cooperative and



shipped to markets in the US and elsewhere. We had a lunch of fried frog legs, which tasted like—you guessed it!— chicken. The best part of the meal for me was the shrimp ceviche. Shrimp is farmed on the coast and trucked around the country as well as exported. Later we all went to the farmer's market in the town of Yantzaza.



Our favorite weekend destination is the Copalinga Ecolodge, just outside of Zamora (www.copalinga.com). It was our fifth time there in as many years, and Belgian owners Catherine and Boudewijn welcomed our group warmly. We hiked into Podocarpus National Park to the Podorosa waterfall, which thundered and spewed mist from all the recent rain. The placid pool where you could wade last time we were there was transformed into a churning caldron.



Back at the lodge, we relaxed with Mojitos on the open-air covered pavilion, watching hummingbirds and other exotic birds flitting about the feeders at the edge of the cloud forest. Serious birders come to Copalinga laden with huge cameras and tripods. We enjoyed chatting with Gloria, a birder from Saskatchewan, and her son Jonathon, and with Jack and his wife from Poland. Dinner that night was a gourmet treat as was breakfast next morning. We fell asleep to the sound of the rushing Bombuscaro River in the valley below us.

Our three weeks in Guadalupe passed quickly. Once more it was a very rewarding experience and we look forward to our next visit.

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