

Health Talents International  
Nicaragua Mobile Medical Clinic  
January 27-February 1, 2011

Trip Report

Team Members: Drs. Alan Boyd, Charles Jarrett, Andrew Prints, Tom Ratts, Ruben Romano and David Weed; Conrad Whitefield, DDS; Pharmacists Debbie Gale and Larry Owens; Dental hygienist Joyce Anthony; Nurses Vicki Ratts and Jean Walton; Translator & Co-Chaplain Steve Fox; Co-Chaplain Robert Taylor; Compassionate caregivers Deborah Amos, Stephen Amos, Linda & Nick Johnson, Shike Keene, Grace McIntyre, Claire Owens, Miranda Prints and Gary Tabor; and Team leader Marie Agee.

As is often the case, travel issues played a significant role. Those of us flying on Continental out of Houston had no problems and arrived in Managua midday as expected. The group flying from West Virginia, however, really struggled. Some arrived around supper time, but the last ones didn't arrive until at least eleven at night. Whew! That is always a hard way to start a hard week.

Despite those issues, our entry into Nicaragua was uneventful, and the crew from the Rene Polanco church had everything all packed up and ready to go for the next day. Our first clinic was to be at Nuevo Horizonte once again. We had gone there last year for the first time and were impacted by the extreme poverty in that area. When we drove up, we saw that the physical facilities were dramatically improved from a year ago. The "church" then consisted of a tin roof and four wooden poles, but it was now twice as big and had 3' high concrete block walls around the perimeter! It was large enough to house all the doctors' "exam rooms" as well as the pharmacy and the eye exam area. There was even a new outhouse!

When we made our way from the vans to where we would be setting up, the preacher named Elvis told me that a local dignitary had come to welcome us. He introduced me to Vice-Mayor Señora Ligia Ulloa Santana, who greeted us warmly and expressed much gratitude for our visit last year and thanked us for returning. She said that Nuevo Horizonte was in very great need of the medical help we provided. It was an encouraging way to start the day.

The dentists were set up in the old church, and since the line of patients was long, they began pulling teeth right away. Joyce Anthony, the dental hygienist, had a busy practice of her own as well. The eyeglass people were working in a corner of the new church building.

Cardiologist Dr. Tom Ratts was with us this year. He had a long line of cardiac patients to see, many of whom falsely thought they had a heart problem, but he was able to reassure them that their problem was likely not heart related. He did diagnose two or three genuine heart problems by the end of the day.

Three medical cases here were particularly notable. One was Dr. Alan Boyd's patient, a man with a severely ulcerated leg called a stasis ulcer. Dr. Boyd said it is not uncommon here in the US but he rarely sees it to the degree this man had it. Lack of adequate medical care allowed it to get that big. He would probably get a skin graft here, but it's not likely that will happen in Nicaragua. He may be facing amputation.

The second one was the wife of a young preacher. She had been robbed about 18 months earlier, and the robber had used a knife to cut the strap on her purse. In doing so, he also sliced deeply thru her baby finger. Because it had never healed, it looked really nasty with infection. She also had no use of it.

Dr. Charles Jarrett worked a good while to open it up and clean it out as best he could under the circumstances. He actually borrowed use of one of the dental chairs for her to lie in while he did his work. He then filled her full of antibiotics to combat the infection, but he suspected that she, too, would end up with an amputation.

The third was Dr. David Weed's patient. A mom brought her 11-month-old daughter in for a doctor to see her baby's deformed finger. The baby's index finger on her left hand was nearly twice as long as it should be, with the end joint being especially large. Clearly, she would need surgery to correct it, which we aren't able to do in Nicaragua. Jose Garcia's wife is a pediatrician, so Jose gathered the needed information from her and promised to ask Dra. Juliana to follow up in getting some local help for her.

We ended the day hot and tired, but delighted in knowing that we'd treated 440 people at this place...and there had even been one baptism. Each and every person seemed grateful for the help they'd received.

On Saturday morning we were at the Rene Polanco Iglesia de Cristo building. We've come here every year since 1994, and the church members and people from surrounding neighborhood seemed glad to see us again. The waiting area was already full, so after a brief devotional, the place became a beehive of activity.

One improvement we enjoyed over last year's clinic in Nicaragua was in the pharmacy. This year we came fully prepared with thousands of pre-prepared prescription labels, which made the filling of prescriptions a piece of cake! For years Guthrie Hite and Dave Ellis came on the trip **and** brought the labels, thus spoiling us to no end. With Guthrie's recent passing and Dave no longer able to come, we found ourselves without labels last year. So...as soon as I got home last year, I began preparing the labels for this year.

Another bonus was having a second pharmacist. Debbie Gale, a veteran of many of these trips to both Nicaragua and Guatemala, responded to my plea to come help Larry Owens, who was our only pharmacist last year. What a difference it made! Larry said he felt like he was on vacation! Thank you, Debbie!!

A robust-looking man of about 40 came in on crutches with a badly swollen foot and leg. He said that a couple of years ago a piece of metal stuck in his foot, but he did not get adequate treatment. Dr. Alan Boyd diagnosed his current condition as a large mycetoma. It's called "Madura foot" and results from a chronic and smoldering infection with a variety of unusual bacteria and fungal organisms. Antibiotic treatment is usually long term (6-12 months) after determining the etiologic agent. Even with that, treatment failures are common. Often, the limb has to be amputated, which is likely what this fellow is facing.

On Sunday after we worshipped with our brothers and sisters at Rene Polanco, we had a free afternoon, and we used it fully. Half the group went back to Leon, where we went last year, to visit the art museum that displays some original Picassos. The other half headed to the Market in Masaya, and after a short time there we drove over to the gorgeous overlook called Catarina. The overlook is above a collapsed volcano that formed a really beautiful lake. While we were there, we spotted a hang glider wafting over the water. It was so serene, even though it was crowded with more people than I've ever seen there before.

Our last day of clinic came all too soon. We drove back to Tipitapa, where we'd gone last year. They have a very fine church building that the church leaders had transformed into a medical clinic.

Karla Marcela Zapata Medrano, a young mother with a baby had recently been diagnosed with lupus. She had no medicine for pain...and no money for medicine. One of the elders told me about her situation and showed me three prescriptions she had that she wasn't able to fill. I took them to the pharmacy, and luckily we had two of the three medicines she needed. We gave her two months' worth and funds to buy a

couple of months of the third. This would hold her until she could be seen by the government clinic, where she would be able to get her medicines for free. She and her husband were very grateful.

The overall breakdown by medical specialty:

Eyeglasses	271	Dermatology	143
Dental Extractions	62	General Medicine	341
Teeth Cleanings	40	Gynecology	24
Cardiology	69	Pediatrics	<u>175</u>
		Total	1125

Jose Garcia already has pinpointed three sites for next year, including a new village as poor as Nuevo Horizonte. He always has more requests from churches for a visit from our medical team than he can fill, so he asked if there was any chance we could begin doing four days of clinic rather than only three. Something to discuss.

We are grateful to Robert Taylor and Steve Fox for their insightful, inspiring devotionals. Both of these men seemed truly inspired as they talked to us each evening, but Robert Taylor's closing words accurately reflect what I suspect we all feel when someone asks us if we had fun. Robert said, *"It's not the kind of trip where you have 'fun,' but it is always a trip worth making."*

Once again the team came home filled with thanksgiving for God's mercies in keeping us safe, and we gloried in how His love fills the hearts of people, no matter their physical circumstances. Enjoy the following pictures of our time in Nicaragua.



The Vice Mayor of Tipitapa (in center) welcoming our medical team



The baby's deformed finger



Dr. Conrad Whitefield and his dental clinic



Baptism at Nuevo Horizonte





Karla, the lupus patient, and her husband and baby



Visit to beautiful Catarina



2011 Nicaragua Mobile Medical Team