

HEALTH TALENTS INTERNATIONAL
March Eye/Ortho Surgery Team
March 7-14, 2009

Participants

Eye Surgeons – Drs. Lee Coleman, Mark Phelan; **Orthopedic Surgeon** – Dr. David Gilliam; **Anesthesia**-Dr. Al Jones; **Dentists**-Drs. John Bailey, Jim Haller; **Physician Assistant**-Gary Hill; **Nurse Practitioners**-Joan Caudill, Keith Rainey; **Pharmacist**-Tim Howard; **Nurses** – Abby Kessler, Steven McElroy; **Harding PA Students**-DeeDee Baker, Staci Clouse, Sarah Ezell, Sarah Spear, Luli Spinola, Lindsey Pierce Verdu; **Harding Pharmacy Students**- LeAnne Foley, Brian Grace, Jack Lin, Crystal Payton, Ben Washam, David Wright, Mandy Young;annah Plexico, Laura Reeder, Janelle Sladek; **Nursing Students**- Kylie Kellis, Kyle Swain; **Translators** – Christina Gifford, Erika Martinez, Aby Owens, Jay Owens, Camilo Verdu; **Compassionate Volunteers** – Jordan Bailey, Madeline Coleman, Cathy Doughty, Dennis Doughty, Mary Garrison, Cameron Gilliam, Vanessa Gilliam, Whitney Gilliam, Jessica Johnson, Amanda Maxedon, Pat McElroy, Sam Phelan, Jan Scott, Dan Watson, Jane Watson, Kathy Watson, Steve Watson; **HTI Team Leader** – Rick Harper.

Though not part of this team, we had another 26 volunteers going to Chichicastenango from Abilene Christian University who arrived the same day and most of them on the same plane. However, a few team members arrived on the Delta flight a bit later and amazingly, only one piece of luggage did not arrive. Not bad by airline standards!

In keeping with recent tradition, Alex and Dany had Pollo Campero fried chicken waiting on us at the airport. This helped pass the time and satisfied hunger while we loaded the bus, van, four pickups and waited for those on the Delta flight. By 6:30 that evening, both teams reached their destination and settled in for the evening. The team at Clinica Ezell had a brief, ten minute meeting after supper and decided to forgo introductions until Sunday morning...beds were calling.

Following breakfast on Sunday morning, we met and proceeded to make formal introductions and tell a bit about ourselves. We all went over for worship at 10:00, impressed as always by the singing of our Guatemalan brethren. After worship, we ate a quick lunch and began eye surgeries, completing four cases that day. Dr. David Gilliam consulted with more than forty orthopedic patients that day, treating many with in-office procedures and scheduling one for surgery on Monday. He also cleaned up a pediatric wheelchair we had in storage for a young patient with spinal bifida, just what the doctor ordered and truly, all we could do for him.

Monday was a bit hectic as we added our education program to the days' schedule. We set up dental and medical exam stations for the children in the school across the street, completing almost 100 exams that first day. (We had to be done by noon since school lets out of the day.) While some children were getting their exams, others were rotating through classes at Clinica Ezell on respect. Respect for environment, the Bible, others, self and so on. All in all, 299 children went through the program over the course of three days that week. Jay and Aby Owens did a wonderful job of preparing this material and employing a talented army of volunteers.



Back in the OR, we sterilized a pair of vise grips, a first to my knowledge, for use in our first orthopedic case. A young girl had her broken femur repaired some years ago, complete with a rod, but never returned to have the rod removed. It was now beginning to protrude from the skin and needed to be removed. Let me tell you, the tools needed for orthopedic care are not the same ones used for eye surgery and cleft lip repair. Hammers, chisels, bone cutters, vise grips, bone saws and...you get the picture. Nevertheless, the surgery was successful and the rod was cleaned up, sterilized and given to the girl as a souvenir.



The next few days were routine, with patients seen in the afternoon, surgeries scheduled for the next day and surgeries performed throughout the day. We completed forty eye surgeries and three orthopedic surgeries over the course of the week with two worthy of special mention.



Many of our trip veterans have met Agosto, the owner and patriarch of the chocolate farm we frequently tour. Agosto was almost completely blind and could no longer read his Bible, an item of great concern for him. He came in on Tuesday for his consultation, one eye was too far gone, but we could restore sight to the other eye. Surgery was scheduled for Wednesday and went smooth.

(Agosto in his 80's with Herb Minor, 90 in January.)



For many, the most memorable patient will be Diego Guarchaj. Dr. Gilliam went out with mobile teams on Wednesday and Thursday as we had no orthopedic surgeries scheduled. As God would have it, Dr. Gilliam was with the team in Xejeypu when Diego, the recent victim of an electrocution came to be seen. Diego, not to be confused with the Diego Guarchaj who works for HTI, had burns on both hands, exit burns on his back and most sadly, one hand was so severely burned that four fingers had died and gangrene would shortly settle in to the flesh. Dr. Gilliam borrowed Dr. Sierra's phone to reach Dr. Al Jones, our anesthesiologist. Dr. Jones confirmed that we had everything we needed, including a tourniquet system and began preparing for surgery. As it turned out, Diego had not eaten breakfast that morning and as soon as he arrived with his family and Dr. Gilliam returned, surgery commenced and two hours later, Diego emerged with four less fingers and good prospects for a long, healthy and productive life.

We were anchored by prayer throughout the week and God honored us with many affirmative answers. He certainly enabled us to serve and we trust he was glorified.

(Diego, before surgery.)

