



A Medical Student's Journey to Honduras

Scott Grant

On a beautiful El Paso spring morning in 2010, Dr. De La Rosa gave a presentation at my church telling the people that he had been charged by the Bishop to lead a medical mission to their sister diocese in Choluteca, Honduras. In our conversation afterward, I asked Dr. De La Rosa if he thought it would be possible to have medical students join the mission. Dr. De La Rosa thought this was a great idea and about six months later he came to me to let me know that we were ready to start planning our first trip. The trip came together within about four months in a whirlwind of meetings and emails and before we knew it, we were landing in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras.

Thirteen medical students, two physicians - Dr. M. de la Rosa and Dr. A. Enriquez, and a representative from the Diocese all piled into a van designed to carry 12 Hondureños. Needless to say, it was quite a squeeze for the three hour bus trip to the coastal region of Choluteca. We spent the first night on "Spring Break" watching the sun set on beaches of Southwestern Honduras and enjoying a delicious meal prepared for us by the local people. The following day the work began. We split the group into two teams, one would go up into the mountains and the other would spend the day serving the rural populations in the valley region. We would have three days of seeing patients during our time in Honduras. Each day, we would show up at the location where we were to see patients and set up a make-shift clinic. Some days, this was an actual building with doors and floors, others it was simply a pavilion over a dirt floor, but we had to make it work with what we had. We would set up sheets or other partitions in an effort to provide patients with as much privacy as possible. Medical students would then go in and take a history and do a physical exam in order to present to the attending physician on their team.

This created a win-win situation because it helped save the attending time in order to see all of the patients in a timely manner, and also gave the students invaluable experience taking histories and physicals, organizing their own assessments and plans of care, and of course practicing Spanish with every patient. Even those of us with minimal Spanish experience were having basic conversations with patients by the end of the three days. Most of the patients we saw had different types of joint pain due to the labor-intensive work most of the people did. We also saw a variety of infectious diseases ranging from infectious pharyngitis to scabies, which the Hondureños called "El Picazon." We even saw a large inguinal hernia and did a minor surgical

procedure on a little girl with an ingrown toenail. At the end of the three days, the teams had combined to see almost eight hundred patients.

Unfortunately, we were not in a position to do anything for the patients who needed major surgery on this trip other than take up a collection and send them to the hospital in Choluteca. We are hopeful that in subsequent trips, we will be able to establish a relationship with the hospital in Choluteca so that we will be able to bring anesthesiologists, surgeons, and all of the surgery support staff necessary to provide other forms of secondary and tertiary care to the patients in the area.

We are currently in the process of preparing for our second trip of what we hope will become an annual event for the students of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine. We will also be including a Public Health component of the trip this year. During this year's trip, students will be performing a needs assessment to see if there are other ways that we can improve the health conditions of our friends in Honduras in addition to the four days of medical care we are able to provide once a year. We are very excited about the great things that we have been able to do for these people and the innumerable things we learned from these patients. This year's trip will take place from March 9th-18th. If you have any questions or would like to find out how you can help, you can contact Scott Grant at scott.grant@ttuhsc.edu.

Scott Grant is a Medical Student at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center - Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, El Paso, Texas.

AD